POLITICAL IMPACT OF ISLAMIC REVIVAL IN A PLURAL SOCIETY
THE CASE OF MALAYSIA

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
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fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by ( )

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B.A., UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE (UK), 1983

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19. ABSTRACT

Like many other multiethnic countries, Malaysia has seen a revival in Islamic fundamentalism in her Muslim populace since the seventies. The ongoing revival has led to pressures on the Malaysian government to establish an Islamic state in the country. Since the eighties, this revival is associated with a deterioration in political relations between Muslims and non-Muslims and a heightening of domestic tensions in the country. This study examines the process by which the activities of Islamic revival movements have contributed to the polarization in Malaysia's domestic politics.

The study analyzes the characteristics of the revival and the impact on some key areas of Malaysian politics. These areas include Muslim and non-Muslim interests, governmental response to the revival, responses of major political parties, and changes in the alignment of popular support for these political parties.

The study shows that the government has adopted conciliatory responses toward the demands of Muslim revivalists because of the pivotal role of the Muslim vote in the electoral process. Such responses have been detrimental to the interests of non-Muslims, resulting in a deterioration in relations between Muslims and non-Muslims at the grassroots level, and a polarization of support for political parties along ethnic lines. If the momentum of the revival continues, interethnic relations are likely to continue deteriorating.

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

THE POLITICAL IMPACT OF AN ISLAMIC REVIVAL IN A PLURAL SOCIETY - THE CASE OF MALAYSIA by MAJ Ng Yat Chung, Singapore Armed Forces, 101 pages.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Events in recent years, such as the Iranian revolution, have emphasized the important role of Islam in international politics. These highly publicized events are manifestations of a revival in Islamic consciousness in Muslim communities throughout the world. As in the past, the current revival is marked by a return to the fundamentals of the faith as practiced by the early Muslims.[1]

A revival in Islamic fundamentalism has always been associated with strong political repercussions. Unlike Christianity in the West, a separation of religion and state has never happened with Islam. Islam offers not only the promise of an after-life, but also a complete life system that includes religion, state and law. In many ways basic Islamic beliefs are incompatible with the secularization and materialism which characterize Western modernization. It is also typical of Islamic fundamentalist movements to seek a new society established according to Islamic prescriptions. In so doing, they challenge the existing political and social order.

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[1]Also known as Moslems and Islamists in different sources.

In domestic politics, the political ramifications of a fundamentalist revival are particularly important in plural societies with large Muslim communities. These countries have populations which are often politically divided along communal or religious lines. A revival among the Muslims has the potential of aggravating communal differences or upsetting the accommodations between the communities. It is therefore noteworthy that the current Islamic revivals in Nigeria and Sudan are associated with a heightening of domestic tensions.

This study deals with the current Islamic revival in Malaysia. Malaysia is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society with a large Muslim population. While the government has been generally successful in preventing communal differences from breaking out in further mass violence, relations among the various communal groups are still strained. Since the mid-seventies, Malaysia has also seen a revival of Islamic fundamentalism which has increasingly strong political overtones in the eighties.

Since independence from the British in 1957, ethnicity has been the dominant theme in Malaysian politics. Strong animosity exists among the ethnic communities, with conflicts of interest over critical issues. Such differences have resulted in instances of racial violence. Religion and ethnicity in contemporary Malaysia are, moreover, both sides of the same political coin. Practically all of the politically dominant Malays are Muslims by birth, while the members of the other ethnic groups are mainly non-Muslims. About 96% of Malaysian Chinese are Buddhists or Taoists, and about 81% of Malaysian Indians are Hindus.[2] Religion is thus inextricably linked with ethnic considerations.

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[2]Raymond Lee, "The Ethnic Implications of Contemporary Religious Movements and Organizations in Malaysia," Contemporary Southeast Asia, 8 (June 1986): 70.

In Malaysia today the outward signs of the revival are obvious. The most visible is the large numbers of urban females who wear orthodox Muslim apparel. The revival also expresses itself in increasing mosque attendance. At the personal level, many Muslims are more concerned with observing Muslim dietary rules and religious duties than before. Concern with dietary rules means that devout Muslims are often wary of eating in the homes of their non-Muslim friends. Consequently, there appears to be a noticeable decline in inter-religious socializing of this kind. The revival has therefore contributed to reduced social contact between Muslims and non-Muslims.

The current Islamic revival, which appeared in the mid seventies, has caused considerable disquiet in non-Muslim communities. The revival has generated Muslim demands which ranged from substituting Islamic laws for secular British laws to establishing compulsory Islamic education in schools. Such demands contradict constitutional guarantees of religious freedom for non-Muslims. Any further polarization in communal relations as a result of religion can adversely affect political stability in the country.

Since the late 1970s, Malay political parties have increasingly used Islamic rhetoric to woo Malay support. For a most recent example, one of the Malay opposition parties was quoted as saying that it would run Malaysia "in the Islamic way" should it win the next general election.[3] In addition, the Malay-dominated government began a process of Islamization in 1982 aimed at increasing the Islamic character of the country, which caused considerable concern among the non-Muslims. Prominent examples include the establishment of an Islamic university, the creation of an Islamic bank and the expansion of Islamic education in schools.

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[3] The Straits Times (Weekly Overseas Edition) (4 Feb 1989), 9.

At the communal level, there are also indications of increased religious tensions in the country. There have been incidents of violence associated with religion. For example, in 1985 the attempted arrest of a recalcitrant Muslim leader by the police led to a clash with his followers which left 18 people dead. Along with the revival in the Muslim community, there are also renewed interest in charismatic Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism among the non-Muslim populace. This has generated some friction which heightens the non-Muslims' sense of discrimination. For example, following incidents where Christian missionaries were found evangelizing among the Muslims, non-Muslims are now forbidden in some states from using some religious words and expressions which are reserved exclusively for Islam.[4]

Against this background of Islamic revival are signs of increasing polarization between the ethnic groups. For example, in October 1987, the government conducted preventive arrests of 106 individuals on the grounds of preventing an outbreak of violence following weeks of buildup in racial tensions in the preceding weeks.[5] This paper focuses on how the Islamic revival have adversely affected communal relations. An understanding of the nature of the impact provides a basis for forecasting future developments in interethnic relations. Such an understanding is also necessary in order to counter any centrifugal pressures on ethnic relations.

OVERVIEW OF ISLAM

The followers of Islam are called Muslims. The word Islam means submission (to the will of God). Those who accept this submission by obeying God's laws are promised an eternal and enjoyable life in paradise. Muslims believe that God's law was revealed to Muhammad, an Arab merchant in Mecca. At the heart of the Islamic faith is the

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[4]Far Eastern Economic Review (May 5 1988), 35. Hereafter cited as FEER.

[5]FEER (November 17 1987), 12-4.

Central to the Islamic faith are the Koran and the Sunnah. The Koran is to Islam what the Bible is to Christianity, and it contains God's word as revealed to Muhammad. These revelations are in the form of parables and stories, similar to the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. The Sunnah is a collection of Muhammad's opinions and decisions as recorded by his followers. These two documents provide the basis for the form and structure of all Islamic beliefs and practices. According to Islamic belief, a believer must perform a body of duties in order to enter paradise. On the day of judgement, God will weigh one's good and bad deeds, and decide on a person's destination, whether heaven or hell.

Among many duties, there are five principal ones a Muslim must perform. In addition to confessing the shahada, a Muslim must pray, give alms, fast and make a pilgrimage to Mecca. These duties constitute what is known as the Five Pillars of Islam. All Muslims accept the basic duties, although they may differ in the details or degree of performing them. A further duty, jihad (exertion or holy war), is also considered essential by some quarters. To exercise jihad, a Muslim needs to protect the faith, overcome the non-believers, bring back those who may have fallen away and correct their erroneous practices. In the name of jihad, extreme actions are sanctioned. This idea of jihad thus provides a religious basis for the activities of many Muslim extremists today.

Like Judaism, Islam is a religion of laws. Its laws are so comprehensive that it has rules for nearly all human activities. It sets rules for government, settling disputes and commercial activities. At a personal level, it provides rules for marriage, dress, and dietary restrictions. Thus a strict adherence to outward rituals is one of the main indicators of an Islamic revival. Since there is hardly any activity not covered by these laws, there is no need for a separate secular jurisdiction. Within Islam, there is no separation of religion, state, and the judiciary. This lack of differentiation explains the demands by revivalists in Malaysia for substituting Islamic laws for secular laws relating to the judiciary and the conduct of government.

Islamic law is called *sharia*.[4] It is popularly associated with very harsh punishments for 'minor' offenses. For example, the punishment for theft involves chopping off the right hand. For the conservative Muslim, modernizing the *sharia* to adapt to new conditions is considered heretical. Not surprisingly, moves to introduce or expand the jurisdiction of *sharia* have generated much alarm and resistance. In Malaysia, *sharia* laws are selectively observed and they are supposed to apply only to Muslims.

These different responses to *sharia* highlight the wide diversity in beliefs and practices within Islam. Islam is by no means a monolithic movement with a common set of beliefs and convictions uniting all Muslims. Since the days of Muhammad, there is no central authority in Islam for interpreting or enforcing Islamic laws. Therefore, it is not surprising that different interpretations and practices have evolved through time in different places. Sharp divisions over political and ecclesiastical issues led to the emergence of sects which diverge from mainstream orthodoxy.

The responsibility of pursuing the ideals of Islam rests with local leadership. At the lowest level, the religious teachers do not necessarily have formal training or belong to a formal ecclesiastical organization within the country. These teachers (called the *ulama* in Malaysia) command great respect and authority, especially in the rural areas. For their part the *ulama* must demonstrate, to the satisfaction of their village constituencies, an ability to read and expound upon the Koran and Sunnah knowledgeably. All *ulama* are also expected to lead prayers and officiate at appropriate rituals. At the village level, the *ulama* are often sought for counsel, and judgement on local disputes and problems. These *ulama* therefore wield very great influence in rural

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[4]Also rendered as *Shariah* or *sya'ria* in different sources.

problems. These *ulama* therefore wield very great influence in rural villages in Malaysia.[7] The absence of a legitimate central religious authority, as will be seen in chapter 4, is an important factor in the tussle between the Muslims supporting the Malaysian government and those supporting opposition Islamic groups.

The process of modernization often conflicts with the precepts of Islam. Secularization - the process of separating religion from politics and social institutions - is an important feature of Western style modernization. Such a process is thus at odds with Islamic laws. Furthermore, many Western practices are not compatible with Islamic laws. In Malaysia, there has been greater sensitivity against elements of 'decadent' Western culture, especially with regards to materialism and sexual mores. For example, the charging of interest for loans is not permissible under Islamic laws. Such anti-modernization tendencies are of concern in Malaysia, which is one of the fastest developing countries in South East Asia.

There are several responses to this conflict. At one end are the modernists who show a willingness to make adjustments to changing conditions in a pragmatic manner. This is the attitude prevalent among urban Muslims who adapt to modernization. For example, leading Muslim in the Malaysian government have no qualms with adopting Western practices in managing the economy. At the other extreme are the fundamentalists who maintain a rigorous adherence to the specific and general rules of the faith. They are prepared to change or reject current circumstances to suit the dictates of Islam. These different categories of responses do not represent separate movements. In any Islamic group, these types of responses are combined with varying degrees of emphasis, depending on the issue at hand.

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[7]For a detailed discussion of the role of the ulama in rural Malaysia, see Judith Nagata, The Reflowering of Malaysian Islam: Modern Religious Radicals and Their Roots, (Vancouver: University of Vancouver Press, 1984), 19-54.

From a political standpoint, the fundamentalists have the greatest potential impact. Unwilling to accept compromises, they tend to be critics rather than defenders of the existing order. In criticizing the status quo and advocating their beliefs, the fundamentalists represent a threat to the political and social stability of their community.

There is a vast body of recent Western literature that deals with the political aspects of the contemporary Islamic revival. Given the complexity, diverse expressions, and consequences of the phenomenon, there is a wide range of views over the underlying causes. All these works have two common themes. The first is the prevalence of the revival in almost all countries with large Muslim communities. The second is the high political profile of the contemporary revival. Different analysts identify different factors as keys to understanding and dealing with the revival. These differing views can be grouped into three main approaches.

The first approach sees Islam as a kind of refuge that maintains its appeal because it has remained constant. Thus in the face of rapid changes or severe setbacks (referred to as a crisis environment), Islam presents an affirmation of traditional values with which Muslims can identify.[8] Several attributes of a crisis environment can precipitate and sustain a revival. These attributes include the loss of legitimacy of political elites and systems, a lack of social justice, an excessive reliance on coercion, military weakness, and the disruptive effects of modernization. This first approach does not delve into the spiritual basis of the revival, but focuses on external stimuli.

A second perspective differs sharply from the first approach. This view sees the success and strength of Muslim communities as more

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[8]For example see R. Hriar Dekmijian's Islam in Revolution (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1985)

important catalysts of an Islamic revival.[9] According to this school, successes associated with Islam, such as the oil boom, spur greater religious consciousness and political activism. Again the focus is on external stimuli.

Yet another approach stresses local conditions as more important than any underlying universal forces affecting all Muslim communities.[10] It is true that Islamic history is marked by continual attempts to return to Islamic ideals. However, the motivation, nature and consequences of an Islamic revival depend on unique circumstances prevailing at the specific time and place.

In summary, Islam contains elements which are incompatible with modern secular practices and standards. Muslim fundamentalists are distinguished by their unwillingness to compromise with or adapt to non-Islamic conditions. Those who are driven to establish a society according to Islamic ideals can present strong challenges to the prevailing social and political order.

Analysts have identified different plausible reasons to explain the occurrence and high political profile of the contemporary Islamic revival. In any specific country, a revival may have been precipitated by a combination of these underlying factors. Whatever the underlying causes, local conditions are more important in determining the expression and ramifications of the revival.

ETHNICITY IN MALAYSIAN POLITICS

The contemporary ethnic cleavages in Malaysia have their roots in the policies of the British colonialists. Chinese and Indian immigrants

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[9]For example see Daniel Pipes' In the Path of God: Islam and Political Power (New York: Basic Books, 1983)

[10]For example see Martin Kramer's Political Islam (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1980)

began to settle en masse in Malaysia in the nineteenth century to satisfy the labor needs of an expanding colonial economy. The Chinese were mainly tin-miners and urban traders while the Indians worked largely in the rubber plantations, on the railways and as retailers. British policy at that time was to shelter the indigenous Malays - the favored race - from economic competition, commercialism and other inimical effects that modern urban life was thought to pose to the Malay culture. The Malays were encouraged to maintain their rural way of life.

The British considered these immigrants to be "guest workers" who would return to their home countries after making good fortunes. There was therefore no effort to integrate the races. In fact the immigrants were permitted to oversee their own affairs and to finance their own vernacular schools, newspapers and associations. Unfortunately, the majority of the immigrants did not return home but stayed and established roots in the country. By the twentieth century, there were almost as many non-Malays concentrated in the urban areas as there were Malays in Malaysia.

Such policies set the stage for animosity among the ethnic groups today. By their participation in economic activities, the non-Malays controlled the wealth within the country. Paradoxically, the British "protection" of the Malay culture condemned the Malays to be the least educated and economically developed of the races at the time of independence in 1957. The feeling of being usurped in their own land by foreigners generated deep resentment and insecurity among the Malays.

When independence came in 1957, the leaders of various ethnically based political parties came to a compromise to satisfy British conditions for independence. In exchange for more liberal citizenship conditions for Chinese and Indian immigrants, special rights for the Malays were recognized by the other two main races. In addition, Islam would be made the state religion while religious freedom for non-Malays was guaranteed. While this agreement was unwritten, most of its terms

were incorporated into the constitution.[11] Even though this compromise satisfied conditions for independence, it did not bridge the ethnic cleavages.

The extent of the ethnic cleavages was dramatically demonstrated by bloody racial riots in May 1969. Clashes between Malays and the Chinese erupted on May 13th in the capital of Kuala Lumpur after the results of the general elections were announced, leaving a death toll of 196. The government subsequently attributed the underlying causes of the riots to the relative economic backwardness of the Malays on the one hand and the questioning of the special status of the Malays by non-Malays on the other.[12] To prevent future occurrences, the government further entrenched the special rights of the Malays by making any constitutional amendments to diminish these rights more difficult. It also prohibited public criticisms of these special rights by declaring such acts seditious. The government also initiated sweeping measures to give the Malays a more equitable share of the country's wealth through the New Economic Policy (NEP). The objective was to be achieved through a dramatic expansion of Malay special rights, together with a series of programs designed to improve the economic status of the predominantly rural Malays.

These government policies (which are essentially still in force today) entailed a massive redistribution of income, jobs, and wealth based on ethnic identity. Such a redistribution certainly did not assuage resentments felt by the non-Malays. By linking Islam with access to these privileges, it also increased the importance of Islam in the political milieu of Malaysia.

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[11]Gordon Means, Malaysian Politics (London: University of London Press, 1970), 173-81.

[12]For a discussion of causes and reactions to this incident see R.S. Milne and Diane Mauzy, Politics and Government in Malaysia (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1978), 79-99.

In summary, the ethnic cleavages in contemporary Malaysia have strong historical roots. Government policies since independence have not reduced the differences. If anything, they serve to provide incentives to maintain, if not accentuate the differences. Ethnicity continues to be the predominant theme in the internal politics of Malaysia.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

It is generally agreed that there is some correlation between the current revival and the perceived deterioration in communal relations. Observers of the Malaysian scene have often cited Islam as a potential destabilizer. Evaluation of the potential threat to stable relations among the ethnic groups ranges from the optimistic to the very pessimistic.[13] What is not so clear is the existence of any causal links between the revival and the perceived deterioration in communal relations. There have not been many attempts to systematically analyze how the revival might have affected communal relations.

This paper analyzes the process by which the current Islamic revival has generated adverse effects on communal relations in Malaysia. The primary research question is: **"How has the current Islamic revival affected political relations among the ethnic groups in Malaysia?"**

The focus of this paper is to understand the process by which the revival has affected political relations rather than a mere description of what has happened. Such an understanding is essential for forecasting any adverse effects on political relations should the revival persist or gather momentum. No attempt will be made to measure the extent of any

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[13]"Malaysia - Last Chance for a new beginning?", Conflict Studies 195 (January 1987): 20.

polarization attributed to the revival or to determine the causes of the revival.[14]

In order to answer this main question, three intermediate issues need to be addressed:

a. What are the salient issues which divide the main ethnic groups in Malaysia?

b. What are the manifestations of the current Islamic revival?

c. What are the reactions of the government and non-Muslim communities to this revival?

DEFINITION OF TERMS

For this paper, the following definitions of key terms apply:

a. "Political relations" refers to the balance of salient interests and political power between the communal groups. A deterioration in political relations is signified by major shifts in support away from moderate parties toward more radical and extremist parties. Conversely, an improvement in political relations is indicated by a strengthening of moderate positions at the expense of extremist parties.

b. "Muslims" refers to the followers of Islam.

c. "Fundamentalists" refers to those Muslims who insist on a strict adherence to the original rules, teachings, and practices of the

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[14]For a brief survey of plausible causes for the Islamic revival, see Chandra Muzaffar, Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia (Petaling Jaya, Malaysia: Penerbit Fajar Bakti Sdn. Bhd., 1987), 13-41.

faith. They are characterized by the desire to impose Islamic ideals upon others, whether Muslims or non-Muslims.

d. "Revival" describes the heightening of Islamic consciousness. Other terms such as "resurgence" and "reassertion" have been used in the literature to describe this phenomenon. Although there are fine semantic differences between these terms,[18] they are not crucial for this paper. These terms will be used interchangeably in this paper.

e. "Ethnic group" refers to a particular race, such as the Malays, Chinese or Indians. In this paper, this term will be used interchangeably with "racial group" and "communal group".

f. "Communal relations" means the balance of power and interests among the communal groups.

g. "Salient" describes issues or interests where recurring conflicts in critical interests among various groups exists . The term is used to distinguish between fundamental and longstanding interests from parochial and short term interests. As an illustration, the perceived economic disparity between the Malays and non-Malays is a salient issue.

h. "Islamization" refers to the process initiated by the Malaysian government in 1982 to cultivate an overtly more Islamic character for the country.

i. "*Dakwah*" refers to Islamic missionary organizations active in the urban areas of Malaysia. These organizations spearhead the contemporary Islamic revival.

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[18]Ibid., 2-3.

ASSUMPTIONS

There are two main assumptions. First, the current Islamic revival (or at least the prominence of Islamic considerations) is assumed to continue for the immediate future. To date, the indicators suggest that the revival has not waned.

Second, it is assumed that Malaysia's internal developments since the formation of the federation are driven by internal considerations rather than by external influences. Such an assumption allows the focus to center on Malaysia alone. The ethnic-religious boundaries in Southeast Asia transcend national boundaries. There are therefore links among the countries' Muslim populace. Certainly, some mutual moral support can be expected. There is, however, no evidence of systematic and active manipulation of Malay Muslims by external powers.

LIMITATIONS

Limitations in the study are determined by the availability of research sources. The study will be based on open literature published in English.

The first difficulty is posed by the paucity of primary sources. Contacts with actors in the area studied are impossible under circumstances in the Command and General Staff College (CGSC). The paper therefore relies heavily on secondary sources. To minimize this limitation, independent corroboration by multiple sources is used as a validity test for information.

Quantitative data on Islam-related matters are also limited. A person is a Muslim by self-identification. Beliefs change and the extent of devoutness may vary with time. Meaningful data are therefore hard to obtain. Very little work has been done by non-government agencies to collect data pertaining to religious belief. Religion is a sensitive issue in Malaysia. Unofficial sociological surveys on Islam can

technically be seditious in the country. Official records on religious activists are not published. Because of this deficiency in quantitative data, this paper focuses on the nature of the influences generated by the revival rather than measuring the potency of these influences. Any attempt to gauge the relative importance of these influences will be highly subjective.

The next difficulty concerns the inherent limitation of many of the secondary sources. While English is an important working language, the main language in Malaysia is Malay. This paper relies on literature written in or translated to English. Many of these works are written by non-Muslim, Western authors who are not permanent residents in that country. Most of them seek to understand the Islamic phenomenon from sociological, economic, cultural or political perspectives. Even though they can be impartial observers, the validity of the conclusions is inherently limited by the extent to which the motivations behind a religious phenomenon can be adequately understood from such secular perspectives. The effect of this limitation is mitigated to some extent since the paper focuses on the consequences of the revival rather than the cause.

DELIMITATIONS

There are three main delimitations in this study. Firstly, the study will focus on events in West Malaysia. Malaysia is geographically divided into two halves - West (or Peninsular) Malaysia and East Malaysia on the island of Borneo. The 400-mile separation means that each half is insulated to some extent from the effects of events occurring in the other. The demography and historical experiences in East Malaysia are also vastly different from West Malaysia. Since independence, events in West Malaysia have had much stronger impact on the whole nation. Most of the population of Malaysia lives in the western half, which is much more developed. The inter-ethnic animosity is also stronger in West Malaysia where the 1969 racial riots occurred. It is also in West Malaysia where the current Islamic

revival is more clearly manifested. For these reasons the study will be confined to West Malaysia. For the rest of this paper, Malaysia will refer to West Malaysia unless otherwise stated.

Secondly, the study will focus primarily on events happening since 1971. After the 1969 racial riots, the country was ruled by an ad-hoc emergency council until 1971. Parliamentary control was reestablished and extensive constitutional amendments and policy changes resulting from mass racial violence in 1969 took effect in that year. The current revival also began to manifest itself around that time. Events before that date are important in setting the context for this study. However, literature covering events in this earlier period is readily available and there is wide agreement in the interpretation of events prior to 1971. Thus, this study will only highlight earlier events in so far as they are helpful in understanding more recent events.

Finally, this paper will consider only issues with political salience. Specifically, it will deal with issues which affect inter-communal relations within Malaysia. The social, economic and cultural ramifications will not be addressed unless they have political salience.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Islam is an important political factor in many developing countries today. The militant overtones associated with Islamic revivals in several countries are often alarming to non-Muslim communities in these countries. In order to respond effectively against any adverse effects on communal relations, there is a need to understand the ideology and driving force behind these revivals, the effects of a revival on communal relations, and the process by which a revival brings about these effects. This study attempts to contribute to this understanding by focusing on the Islamic revival of Malaysia.

In Malaysia, the effects of a revival on communal relations are potentially more dangerous given the large non-Muslim population, the delicate nature of communal relations, and the history of inter-ethnic violence. Ethnic boundaries in South East Asia transcend national boundaries. Close ethnic links are maintained across national boundaries. Thus, internal development in one country often can influence the domestic situation in neighboring countries. Muslims in other South East Asian countries are also experiencing Islamic revivals in the last two decades. Consequently, there is a further danger of ethnic conflicts in Malaysia resulting from the revival spreading to neighboring countries like Singapore or Thailand. It is therefore important for regional stability that any adverse effects from the revival are controlled, if not neutralized.

Although the substantive conclusions will be relevant only to Malaysia, the approach adopted and insights gained in the study will be useful to others studying similar situations.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE SURVEY AND METHODOLOGY

LITERATURE SURVEY

The paper deals with the impact of the contemporary Islamic revival on interethnic political relations. An appreciation of the political milieu of modern Malaysia is therefore essential before the import of the revival can be understood. All the literature on the contemporary Islamic revival supposes an understanding of the nature of Malaysian politics. The following literature survey will therefore cover research on key aspects of Malaysian domestic politics and works dealing specifically with the contemporary revival.

MALAYSIAN DOMESTIC POLITICS

A vast amount of literature is available on Malaysia's political milieu. There is general agreement regarding what are the key features and fundamental issues in this area. The conclusions in R.S. Milne and Diane K. Mauzy, Politics and Government in Malaysia, are typical. The authors concluded that ethnicity was the predominant factor that shaped the government's domestic policies. The ethnic groups had long standing disputes over a few salient issues. These included the preferential status enjoyed by the Malays and the government's policies on economics and education. Among the ethnic groups, the differences between the politically dominant Malays and the economically dominant Chinese were the most acrimonious. Before the advent of the revival,

religious issues had not been contentious issues among the communal groups in the 1970s.

Among these salient issues, Richard Clutterbuck in Conflict and Violence in Singapore and Malaysia 1945-1983, concluded that differences over education harbored the greatest potential for ethnic conflict. This was because education is a crucial vehicle for improving economic status, as well as for preserving the culture of each ethnic group.

These books focus mainly on events before 1980, and so do not cover the impact of the Islamic revival, which became prominent after 1980. In spite of this deficiency, these works are very useful for this paper, since they provide a "snapshot" of the interethnic political relations before the advent of the revival. This "snapshot" will be used in the paper to compare with inter-ethnic political relations in the 1980s to analyze the impact of the Islamic revival.

CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC REVIVAL IN MALAYSIA

As the focus narrows to the contemporary Islamic revival, the number of comprehensive works available decreases. This is because the revival is a recent and evolving phenomenon. Consequently, few books have been written on the subject and most literature on the subject is found in academic journals which cover specific aspects of the revival.

Chandra Muzaffar, Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia, (1987) analyzes the revival on the basis that the driving force behind the phenomenon came from the ethnic cleavage in the country. According to the author, the revival is a veneer for the dominant Malays to maintain a separate and distinct ethnic identity, so as to preserve the dominant position of the Malays *vis-a-vis* the non-Malays. The revival is driven by ethnic animosity, and in turn will further polarize the ethnic groups. Thus, the author expected communal relations to deteriorate as a result of the revival. No solution to countervail the detrimental effects of the revival was offered.

Muzaffar's analysis in the book is not without criticism. The author is a noted reformist in Malaysia. It was clear from the verbiage in the book, that the author has a rather negative perception of the motivation and goals of the revivalists. The author analyzes the motivations and the activities of the actors almost exclusively with the assumptions that the revival was but a veneer to exert Malay hegemony. Such a position cannot fully explain why the revival was spearheaded by Islamic missionary groups, most of which have no connections with any political party. It also cannot fully explain why many of the revivalists were among the most ardent critics of the government's preferential policies toward the Malays. Despite these weaknesses, Muzaffar's work offered valuable insight on how the revival was perceived by a non-Malay who is suspicious of the motives of the revivalists. The author's stance showed that from the non-Malay perspective, the revival was perceived as an attempt to further Malay dominance, an important factor in the subsequent analysis in this paper.

Judith Nagata, The Reflowering of Malaysian Islam, (1984) is a pioneering work on the main Islamic missionary (*dakwah*) movements which are at the vanguard of the contemporary revival in Malaysia. The author concluded that in spite of the revival, ethnic considerations are still strong among the Muslims. Despite Islam's opposition to racism, the rank and file members of these organizations supported the government's preferential policies toward the Malays. The author noted that as a result of this revival, Islam had emerged as the key element defining Malay identity. If the trend continued, political parties seeking Malay support would have to subscribe to Islamic ideals in order to gain legitimacy. In addition, the author noted the inability of leading Muslims to define what an Islamic state was and how best to establish an Islamic state in Malaysia. Yet an Islamic state was a centerpiece of the revivalists' many demands. Since this book focused on the *dakwah* organizations which are based in the urban areas, it does not deal extensively with the revival in the rural areas. Yet most of the Malays

today are still rural dwellers. The understanding of the revival is incomplete without a better understanding of Islam in the rural areas.

Clive Kessler, Islam and Politics in a Malay State, partly filled this gap by dealing with the role of Islam in rural Malay-inhabited areas. The radical opposition Islamic party, PAS (Partai Islam Se Malaysia), draws most of its support from rural Malays. The author attempted to analyze the reasons for the hold PAS had established over these areas. He argued that the support for PAS is an expression of class differences between the rich aristocratic class and the rural peasants. According to the author, the appeal of the Islamic party depended more on social class differences rather than religion. Hence, the revival in rural areas was an expression of internecine competition among the Malays. However, it was not clear from this work how a revival would affect interethnic relations.

Simon Barroclough, Managing the Challenges of Islamic Revival in Malaysia, assessed the effectiveness of government measures adopted to contain the impact of the revival. The underlying assumption was that the government was determined to check the influence of the revivalists. While such an assumption would be valid up to 1982, it is questionable after 1982, when the government appeared to actively seek a greater Islamic profile for the country. However, the author still concluded that the government, for the most part, had chosen to respond with conciliatory measures to placate Islamic pressures. Such responses to Islamic pressures may, concluded the article, create serious problems for communal stability. The more concessions were made, opined the author, the more difficult it might be to moderate further demands. In light of the government's more pro-Islam stance after 1982, the author's conclusions can be reevaluated and related to the changes in interethnic political relations.

Two related articles by Raymond L.M. Lee, The Implications of Contemporary Religious Movements and Organizations in Malaysia and

Patterns of Religious Tensions in Malaysia, dealt with apparent religious revival in non-Muslim communities concurrent with the Islamic revival. This is a phenomenon which is alluded to in many of the works cited earlier, but where comparatively little research had been done. The author concluded that in the face of these revivals in non-Islamic alternatives, the sense of religious discrimination among non-Muslims had intensified. Attempts had been made by non-Muslims to present a united front against perceived encroachment on their religious freedom by the Muslims. If the government's conciliatory responses toward Muslims continued, the author believed that non-Muslims may become more politicized too, thus blurring the distinction between religion and political conflicts. In his analysis, the author focused his attention at the social level, and did not link his analysis to party-level politics.

SUMMARY

Not much research has been done which dealt specifically with the impact of the revival on communal relations. Most of the research concentrated on other issues concerning the revival in Malaysia. Many of these works dealt with the formulation of government policies. The potential destabilizing effects of the revival were often alluded to in these studies. Since the revival is a comparatively recent and evolving phenomenon, the findings in these works were often tentative and not conclusive. In many cases, the findings are superceded by subsequent developments.

There is general agreement over a strong association between the revival and a perceived deterioration in communal relations. There is also agreement that ethnicity remains the predominant theme in Malaysian politics. Before the advent of the revival, the ethnic groups were split over the salient issues of Malay political dominance, economic issues and education policies.

Religion had not been a contentious issue until the revival surfaced. However, no attempt had been made to identify the effects of the current revival on communal relations, the extent of these effects, or the process by which these effects were produced. This study can partially remedy this deficiency by examining how the revival has affected communal relations. It will also synthesize the findings from different areas and perspectives, and reevaluate some of the dated findings in light of more recent events.

METHODOLOGY

APPROACH

In designing the approach, several features were noted from the political milieu of Malaysia. First, by common assent, ethnicity is the predominant factor in Malaysian politics. The salient issues dividing the ethnic groups since independence have remained in force. Second, religion is a comparatively recent phenomenon, and has not supplanted ethnicity in importance though it may emerge as a salient issue. Third, in spite of sporadic incidents of minor demonstrations, Malaysians have generally chosen to secure their political interests through the legal political process based on partisan politics.

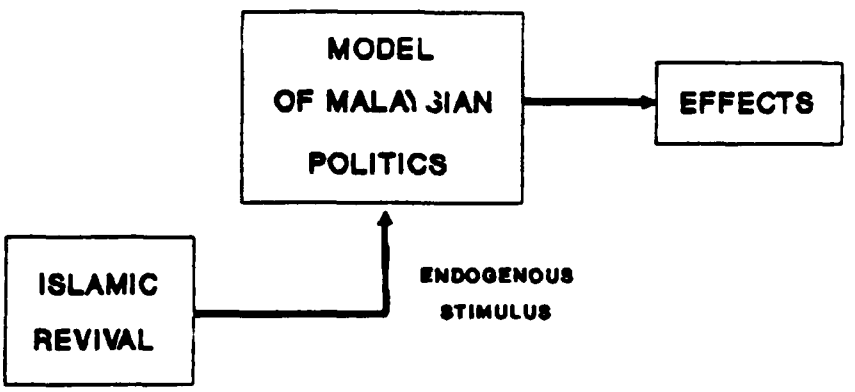
Based on these features, the basic approach was to compare two "snapshots" of the state of political relations among the communal groups at two different times. The first is in 1978, the year of the last elections before the Islamic revival become prominent in the political arena. The second is in 1986, the year of the latest elections. The comparison would allow the identification of the effects wrought by the revival.

In order to identify the process behind these observed effects, a model of how Malaysian communal politics operate was needed. It will essentially be a model of the balance of power and salient interests

among the communal groups and political parties up to 1978. In this approach, the Islamic revival can be conceived as an endogenous disturbance on the balance of ethnic power and interests. The relationship between the revival and the model assumed in this approach is depicted in figure 1.

Based on the model, the possible effects of the revival can be hypothesized. The process by which the model derived these predictions would be the hypothesized process by which the revival would affect communal relations. If there was concurrence between what the model predicted and what was observed, the hypothesized process is substantiated. The objective was not to measure the extent of the effects associated with the revival, but to understand the process by which these effects resulted from the revival.

Fig. 1 Relation of the Revival to the Model



Based on this approach, the analysis in this paper was conducted in five steps as follow:

STEP 1 Construct a model of contemporary domestic politics in Malaysia based on the situation up to 1978. The model is constructed based on analyzing the following:

a. Characteristics of the major communal groups.

b. The salient issues dividing the communal groups.

c. Government and the political process.

d. Major political parties, their relation to the communal groups and their power to pursue interests.

STEP 2 Analyze the characteristics of the contemporary Islamic revival movement in Malaysia. Extract those features which can affect communal relations.

STEP 3 Using the model, analyze the possible effects of the revival on communal relations. In this step, a hypothesis is constructed regarding the process by which the revival can affect political relations among the communal groups.

STEP 4 Analyze the effects of the revival between 1978 and 1986. The effects cover the following areas:

a. Response of the opposition Islamic party.

b. Response of the government.

c. Response of the non-Muslim community

d. Status of political relations among the communal group.

These observed effects are compared with those predicted by the model in step 3. Agreement between the predicted and observed effect substantiates the hypothesized process linking the revival with changes in political relations among the communal groups.

The function under examination is the state of political relations between the communal groups, i.e., the balance of communal power and communal interests. To conduct this examination, some method is needed to consistently track shifts in this balance over time. There is, however, no easy way to track this directly. Some indirect indicator is needed.

The most convenient indirect indicator of the shift in ethnic balance is a corresponding shift in the balance in partisan power. Such a link is plausible since the main parties draw their support from specific communal groups. Competition among parties supported by a particular ethnic group can be taken to reflect intra-communal differences.

The shifts in partisan power can be indexed by observables such as party positions, success in securing interests in various issues and election performance. These observables are well documented by the news media and are also studied extensively by academics. If the link between ethnic and partisan power can be made, the latter is easier to track. In order to make this connection, as well as for subsequent analysis, some assumptions are needed.

MODELLING ASSUMPTIONS

Assumption 1 Ethnicity is and will continue to be the predominant factor that determines the domestic situation in Malaysia. The Islamic revival is not yet the predominant issue, but it can have significant impact on existing balance of power and interests among the communal groups. This assumption undergirds the validity of the whole approach.

Assumption 2 The communal groups in Malaysia will continue to rely on the political process to pursue their interests as long as they continue to consider the process legitimate. Since 1969, all communal groups have relied on the process to voice their concerns.

Assumption 3 The positions of the political parties (which are communally based) reflect the interests of the group they represent. The combination of this and the second assumption means that as long as the political process is considered legitimate, it is valid to use the positions of the parties as indicators of communal interests. This

overcomes the methodological difficulty of identifying communal interests.

Assumption 4 The electoral success of a party reflects its power to secure its interests. This allows electoral performance to be used as an index of a party's legitimacy in representing a group's interests

Assumption 5 A communal group will consider the political process legitimate as long as the members can protect at least some of their vital interests through the process. Loss of legitimacy in the eyes of a communal group opens the door to extra-parliamentary means, including violence, to protect or advance its interests. This means a breakdown of the system. From the methodological standpoint, this assumption (implicit in most works on the subject) is needed to allow the use of the power to protect interests as an index of the potential for destabilizing the system. The power to protect interests can be observable whereas the potential for destabilization is more abstract.

These assumptions provided the basic starting point for subsequent analysis. Some of these may appear trivial, but they were essential for the logic of subsequent analysis.

USE OF SOURCES

Numerous books and articles have been written on how ethnic politics works in contemporary Malaysia. The information used for step one of the analysis was distilled from these sources. Such an approach was valid, since there is general consensus concerning the identification of major actors, their interests, and their power to secure their interests. Corroboration in opinions and conclusions of independent authors (especially between local and foreign observers) constituted a valid test for veracity of a piece of information.

A similar approach was used for steps two and four of the analysis, with greater reliance on articles in academic journals, newspapers and

news periodicals. News reports and current affairs type articles provided the main sources for chronicling the major activities related to the Islamic revival. Some discretion was needed to separate opinions from facts. The objectivity of such opinions, influenced by editorial bias or government control, may be suspect, especially for local papers. Greater reliance was placed on reports which are descriptive in nature, and therefore verifiable.

CHAPTER 3

MODEL OF ETHNIC POLITICS IN MALAYSIA

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

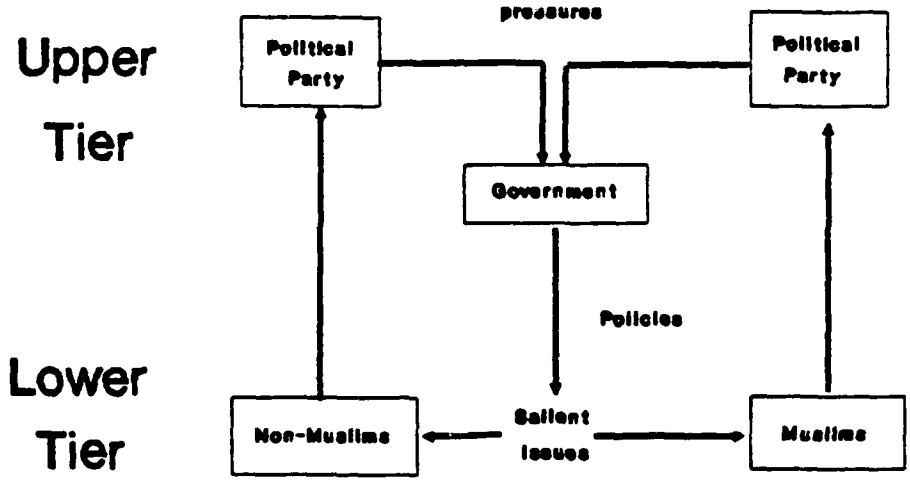
Before analyzing the process by which the Islamic revival has affected political relations between the communal groups, a prior understanding of Malaysian domestic politics is needed. One needs to understand the activities of the political actors, the salient political issues and the alignment of political forces. In addition, one needs to understand the characteristics of the communal groups and the inter-communal conflicts from which the political issues are ultimately derived. This chapter presents the findings of step 1 of the analysis, where a model of Malaysian politics up to 1978 is constructed.

Figure 2 shows the structure of the model. The model comprises two tiers. The lower tier consists of the communal groups, while the upper tier depicts the major political parties. The model is constructed to capture the process whereby disputes at the communal level, whether of political, social, economic or religious origins, are translated to issues at the partisan level.

At the lower tier, communal groups are divided by conflicting interests over salient issues. The government is the arbiter of these conflicting interests through the formulation of domestic policies and programs which may favor one side over the others. Communal interests are articulated through political parties which are communally based in Malaysia. Issues in the upper tier of the model therefore mirror those in the lower tier. Political parties compete in the electoral process to win the right to form the government, or at least secure a sizable

representation. Communal disputes can also be manipulated and exacerbated by the political parties during partisan disputes. In this way, the model captures the process by which communal disputes are transferred to the political arena and vice versa.

Fig. 2. Structure of the Model



The Islamic revival has affected the protagonists in both tiers of the model. It has generated conflicts at the communal level which will also appear at the political level. At the level of party politics, the revival was also exploited for political gains. As long as the nature of Malaysian politics is fundamentally unchanged (i.e., ethnicity is still the predominant factor), the model can be used to postulate the effects of such a revival on the political relations between the communal groups. If the observed effects of the revival concur with those predicted by the model, the model has succeeded in identifying a process by which the Islamic revival has affected political relations between the communal groups.

THE COMMUNAL GROUPS AND SALIENT ISSUES

COMMUNAL GROUPS

This section presents the lower tier of the model. The main ethnic groups in Malaysia are the Malays, the Chinese and the Indians. For the purpose of the paper, the population can be depicted as in figure 3. The Malaysian population is divided into two almost equal halves: the Malays and the non-Malays. According to 1980 census data, West Malaysia's ethnic balance is approximately 56 percent Malay, 33 percent Chinese, 10 percent Indian, and a remaining one percent comprising Eurasians, Thais, and other small nationalities.[1] This Malay/non-Malay distinction is the primary cleavage between the communal groups. Since all Malays are Muslims, and the proportion of non-Malay Muslims are small, the term Muslim is almost synonymous with Malay.

Most indicators show the Malays to be the most disadvantaged ethnic group in the country in terms of economic status.[2] Generally, the Chinese tend to have higher levels of schooling, more diverse occupations and higher income levels. Indians tend to hold an intermediate status between the Chinese and the Malays. Hence the figure shows more non-Malays in the higher income levels. Although the Malays are economically the most backward, they are politically the dominant group in Malaysia due in part to their numerical superiority.

The Malay/non-Malay cleavage is maintained because both sides continue to maintain their distinct ethnic identities. For the Malays a distinct identity is essential for preserving their political dominance.

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[1]Malaysia, Department of Statistics, 1980 Population and Housing Census of Malaysia: General Report of the Population Census (Kuala Lumpur: Government Printers, 1983), 21. Hereafter cited as 1980 Census.

[2]Kevin Young, Willem Bussink and Parvez Hasan, Malaysia: Growth and Equity in a Multiracial Society (Washington, D.C.: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 1980), 16, 55-56,115, 130-31.

The Malay population is considered indigenous to the country, and along

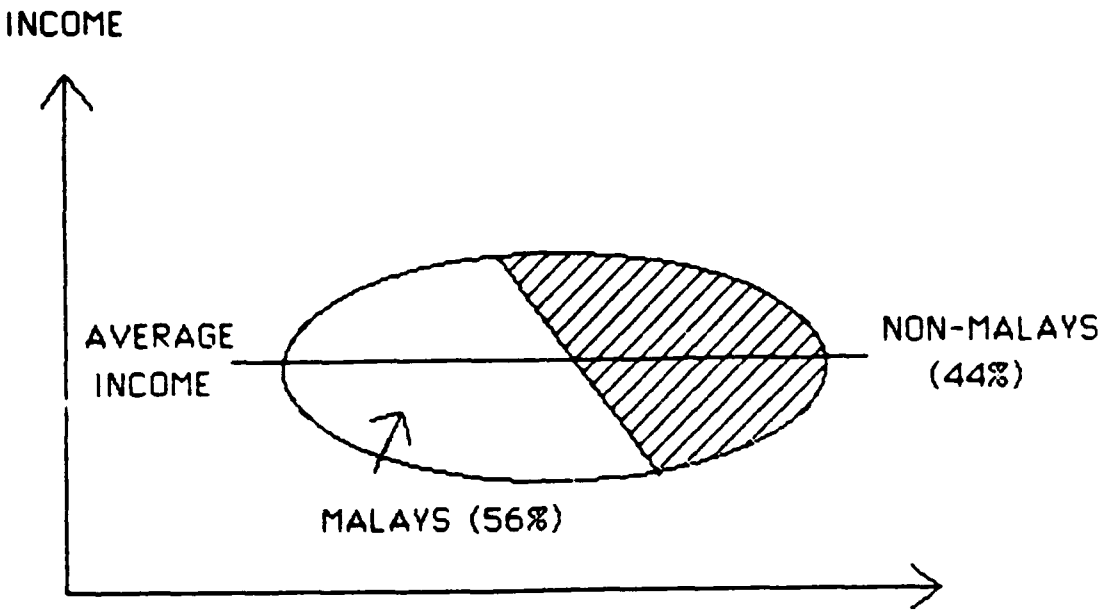

FIG. 3. MALAYSIAN DEMOGRAPHY

with other small aboriginal tribes, are known as ***bumiputra*** (sons of the earth). The implication is that, as the indigenous peoples of the modern state, they are entitled to represent the social, political and cultural core of the country. Consequently, their dominant status in the country has always been vigorously defended by the Malays. The importance of preserving this dominance is demonstrated, for example, in a public speech, a Malay member of parliament from the ruling coalition was quoted as saying:

> "...the political system in Malaysia is founded in Malay dominance. That is the premise from which we should start...there are many Malays... would rather share poverty...than see their political position eroded..."[3]

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[3]Straits Times (Singapore), September 1 1986.

This need to assert a separate identity is further intensified by the fact that the dominant Malays command only a small numerical slim majority over the non-Malays. Unless the Malays can number a psychologically important 50 percent of the population, much of the legitimacy of Malay dominance is lost. This insecurity may be a contributing factor why the maintenance of a distinct Malay identity is of such importance to the Malays.

Similarly, the Chinese and Indians are resistant to assimilation.[4] Maintenance of the Chinese and Indian culture are strong emotional issues, and are often seen in terms of ethnic loyalty. Since an education in the native language is instrumental in preserving a separate cultural identity, the defense of Chinese and Indian language education has been an emotional issue with the respective communal groups.

Although not shown in figure 3, intra-communal divisions exist in all the ethnic groups. These dividing lines are important for this study because the support for different political parties representing a communal group is often split along these lines. For the Malays, the divisions are based on commoner-aristocratic status, wealth, and the rural-urban residence. Among the Chinese, the division is between the wealthy middle-class and the working-class Chinese.

The Malaysian Indian community is the most heterogeneous and dispersed of the three main ethnic groups in Malaysia. These Indians are descendants of immigrants from various parts of India, with diverse religions and languages. This diversity within the Indian community is a major obstacle in mobilizing themselves politically. Another more serious obstacle to mobilizing the Indians politically lies in their demographic distribution. The Indian population is not concentrated like the Chinese and Malays.[5] In no constituency does the Indian

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[4]Means, Malaysian Politics, 32-3.

[5]1980 Census, 21.

community comprise more than one fourth of the electorate.[4] This inability to mobilize effectively explains why discussion of ethnic antagonism invariably reduces to differences between the Chinese and the Malays.

SALIENT ISSUES

In the model, interethnic animosity is expressed in terms of differences over some key salient issues. As in 1978, the communal groups are divided over three salient issues. These are derived from differences in status among the communal groups, differences in economic status and each communal group's desire to maintain a distinct ethnic identity.

Preferential status for Malays

The constitution sanctions the preferential status of the Malays and other indigenous races in public spheres, while balancing these with guarantees of non-Malay rights. For instance, while it establishes Islam as the official religion and Malay as the sole national language, it also prescribes constitutional rights of religious freedom and prohibitions against any restrictions on the teaching of any language.[7] In the aftermath of the 1969 racial riots, any public discussion which questions the constitutional status of the Malays is considered seditious.[8] In particular, any attempt by non-Malays to question the formulation of policies on Islam can be construed as seditious.

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[4] R.S. Milne and Diane K. Mauzy, Politics and Government in Malaysia, 135.

[7] Federation of Malaya, Malayan Constitutional Documents, 2nd ed. Vol. 1, (Kuala Lumpur: Government Printers, 1962), 27-28, 31 (Articles 3 and 11).

[8] Milne and Mauzy, Politics and Government in Malaysia, 95-97.

The legitimacy of the preference for Malays will continue to be a key salient issue dividing the communal groups. Malays are expected to guard this privilege jealously. Although the status of Malays cannot be questioned by law, it has not ceased to be a source of frustration for non-Malays. This frustration is particularly acute for those non-Malays who were born in Malaysia. They are less able to appreciate the rationale for the maintaining the preferential status for the Malays, since they too were born in the country.

Economic Issues

Economic disparity among the various communal groups has been cited as one of the key underlying causes of the 1969 racial riots. From the Malay perspective, it is intolerable that, as the indigenous people, Malays should be the most disadvantaged group. Thus, since the aftermath of the 1969 riots, the redress of this imbalance has been a key rallying point for Malays in Malaysian politics.

The New Economic Policy (NEP), formulated in the wake of the 1969 riots, has been a constant source of non-Malay frustrations. It puts forth a 20-year plan to eradicate poverty and eliminate economic disparity between the Malays and non-Malays.[9] In order to increase Malay participation in the economy, the government vastly expanded direct preferences for the Malays in economic spheres.[10]

The implementation of tne NEP has dissatisfied both the Malays and non-Malays. Despite progress in eliminating poverty in the country, income distribution, both within and among ethnic groups, however, remained skewed. Government data between 1973-79 show that the average household income had risen faster than the median income. This suggested that the top-half of the income distribution was expanding its income

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[9]Government of Malaysia, Third Malaysian Plan, 1976-1980 (1976): 7.

[10]For a detailed discussion of objectives and strategy, see Kevin Young et al, 61-75.

more rapidly than the bottom. This gap was especially large among Chinese households.[11] Across ethnic groups, the Malays still remain the poorest ethnic group despite some narrowing in the income gap. By 1979, the average income of the poorest 40 percent of Malay households was one-half that of similar Chinese households, increasing from 42 percent in 1970.[12]

This failure to achieve a more equitable income distribution has drawn criticism from both Malay and non-Malay quarters. From the Malay perspective, the government has merely expanded the urban Malay middle-class without doing enough for the rural Malays. Similarly, the sense of discrimination among the rural and working class Chinese has grown. The preference in employment given to Malays, especially in the public sector, resulted in a transitional generation of non-Malays who are denied employment opportunities in jobs for which they are qualified. Such frustrations will not be easily ameliorated if the present policy is continued beyond the stipulated 20 years in 1990.

In the area of commerce and corporate business, modern Western practices are adopted. Although by 1978 such practices had not been called into question, some Islamic revivalists have pressed for the adoption of Islamic practices instead. This will be of concern to the middle-class Chinese, who dominate the business scene in Malaysia.

Language and Education

Since language and education are key elements in maintaining a distinct ethnic identity, they are important to the various ethnic groups. The establishment of Malay as the national language had been

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[11]Frederica Bunge (ed.), Malaysia: A Country Study (Washington D.C.: American University, 1985), 142-3.

[12]Ibid.

one of the most politically sensitive issue since independence.[13] With some exceptions when English can be used, Malay must be used for all official purposes. As part of this policy, Malay was substituted for English as the primary medium of instruction in all secondary schools. Government-funded Chinese and Tamil language schooling is now only available at the primary level. Thus, Chinese and Indians have had to learn Malay to further their education. Opposition from non-Malays subsided in the 1980s as the rates of literacy in Malay among the younger non-Malays increased. According to the 1980 Census, 41% of Malaysian Chinese and 61% of Malaysian Indians (age 10 and over) are literate in Malay, twice the figures in the 1970 census.[14] The improved literacy in Malay has reduced the salience of the dispute over the preeminence of the Malay language in the 1980s.

The continuation of vernacular education, however, remained one of the most salient issues dividing the races up to the mid-1980s. Any attempt by the Malay dominated government to temper with or restrict non-Malay vernacular education was construed as an attempt to exert Malay dominance.

Chinese sensitivity toward continuing vernacular education is still very much alive today. This was illustrated by the outcry over a government decision to appoint non-Chinese educated teachers to positions as deputy heads of Chinese language schools in October 1987. In protest, a mass meeting was organized by the Chinese-based political parties. This dramatically heightened ethnic tensions in the country. An outbreak of violence was preempted after the government conducted mass preventive arrests later in the month.[15]

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[13]R.S. Milne and Diane Mauzy, Government and Politics in Malaysia, 367-73.

[14]Frederica Bunge (ed.), 109-110.

[15]FEER (November 12 1987), 13.

The government's tertiary education policies have also generated much inter-ethnic animosity. Enrollment of Malays in universities increased dramatically from one-fifth to more than three-quarters between 1963 and 1977. This was allegedly achieved at the expense of many non-Malays who had better scholastic achievements. Since a tertiary education is important in securing a better economic status, this disparity in enrollment is a constant source of unhappiness among the non-Malays.

Religion

Up to 1978, there were no explicit disputes among the ethnic groups over matters of religion. However, in light of the Islamic revival, religious issues were becoming more contentious in the 1980s. Islam is important to the Malays because it is an intrinsic part of the official definition of a Malay. A Malay is one who "professes the Muslim faith, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay custom...".[14] Although all Malays are not equally devout in their religious behavior, there are practically no Malays who deny Islam. Thus, from a Malay perspective, protecting Islamic interests is often synonymous with protecting Malay interests. Hence, propagation of Islam had always been an important campaign issue among parties seeking Malay votes, although it is minor compared with the earlier salient issues up to 1978. Since Islam is so much a part of Malay identity, it is considered a Malay matter by the non-Malays who are non-Muslims.

Although Islam is the official religion of the country, the Constitution provides that everyone has the right to profess and practice his or her own religion. Proselytizing among the Muslims by any other religion, however, is forbidden by state law. Except for this restriction non-Muslims are guaranteed freedom of religion. Up to 1978, this freedom was not interfered with, so that religious issues were not

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[14]Federation of Malaya, Malayan Constitutional Documents, 124 (Article 160).

politically salient. Any new attempt by Malay Muslims to interfere with this freedom will be considered as another attempt to further Malay dominance.

SUMMARY

The population is divided into two antagonistic parts - the Malays and non-Malays - by ethnic considerations. Ethnicity was, and continued up to the 1980s to be the primary factor standing in the way of integration. Each communal group has insisted on maintaining a separate ethnic identity, and in so doing hindered social assimilation. Until some social assimilation is achieved to remove some of the deep seated ethic animosity, ethnicity will continue to be the predominant theme in Malaysian domestic politics for the foreseeable future.

At the political level, such ethnic animosity is expressed in terms of conflicts over some salient issues. In 1978, the issues were the preferential status for the Malays and the government's economic and education policies. These issues were continually raised since independence up to and beyond 1986. As long as there is a difference in legal and economic status between the communal groups, and an insistence by each communal group to assert a distinct ethnic identity, these issues will continue to be raised in the future.

It is important to note that Islam was not a salient issue in 1978. For the Malays, protecting Islamic interests is an intrinsic part of protecting Malay interests. However, between 1970 and 1978, the Malays were more concerned with the "traditional" issues listed above. For the non-Malays, Islam is almost exclusive to the Malays. They are generally disinterested in Islam as long as the practice of Islam does not challenge the non-Malays' freedom of religion provided by the constitution. The advent of the Islamic revival, however, has made religious issues progressively more important in the 1980s, as will be seen in chapter 5.

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL PARTIES

This section presents the upper tier of the model. The model portrays the interactions of various actors in the formal political process to secure communal interests in salient issues. In practice, the interaction among the government, parties and communal groups is very complex. Political parties compete not only at the federal level, but also at the level of state governments, where issues are more parochial. The model generalizes these interactions by focusing on the competition among the communally based political parties for representation in the federal parliament.

Such a generalization is valid because in Malaysian politics, political power is vested in the control of the federal parliament. Whoever controlled the parliament dictated government policies. The government is synonymous with the party which controlled the federal parliament. Hence, it is valid for the purpose of this paper to simplify the complex interactions of the government and the political parties by looking at the most important competition - that of winning representation in the federal parliament.

The Malaysian system of government is modelled after the British parliamentary system. The country is headed by a titular monarch while the chief executive and head of government is the prime minister, who by convention is the leader of the party which enjoys a majority in the federal parliament. Legislative powers are vested in a bicameral federal parliament comprising two houses. Members of the House of Representatives are directly elected from single-member constituencies in nationwide elections. Half the members of the Senate are elected from state assemblies while the other half are appointed by the prime minister. In practice the majority of members in both houses come from the same political party. Legislative and executive powers are therefore vested in the party which controls the federal parliament.

The principles of government organization at the state level follow that of the federal government. In practice, the powers of the state legislature are very limited compared to the federal government.[17] In practice, federal-state harmony is ensured by the fact that control of the federal government and most state governments is vested in the same party. Also, the federal government can wield strong influence over the state government through the control of federal funds and allocation of lucrative development projects.[18]

In this system of government, power is therefore concentrated in the federal parliament. The key to political power is to win sufficient seats in the federal parliament during general elections. Therefore, it is valid to simplify analysis of political relations among the communal groups by focusing the model on partisan competition for election to the federal parliament.

POLITICAL PARTIES

Many political parties are active in Malaysia. Most of these enjoy only local electoral support, and hence are not of national importance. The major political parties in Malaysia that enjoy nationwide support are as follow:

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[17]Means, 182-3.

[18]Means, 184. For a more detailed account of federal-state relations, see Milne and Mauzy, Politics and Government in Malaysia, 107-11.

PARTY	SUPPORT BASE
United Malay National Organization (UMNO)	Mass support among Malays. Strong support from upper and middle-class Malays.
Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA)	Middle-class Chinese
Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC)	Indians
Partai Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS)	Rural Malays
Democratic Action Party (DAP)	Working-class Chinese

The support bases for the parties did not change between 1978 and 1986.

The dominant force in contemporary Malaysian politics up to 1986 has been the ruling National Front (NF), of which UMNO, MIC and MCA are key members. Since independence, the National Front (and its precursors) has won every general election, so that National Front policies are government policies. Within the Front UMNO is the strongest partner, in terms of number of seats. MCA is the second while MIC is the junior partner. Because of its multi-ethnic character, the NF is able so far to straddle the deep Malay/non-Malay cleavage to form a strong and stable government.

Although many opposition parties are active, only two are strong enough to win seats in the federal parliament in 1978. The PAS (also known as Pan Malaysia Islamic Party, PMIP, and Partai Islam, PI) is a rural-based Muslim fundamentalist party. The party was an outgrowth of UMNO in the 1950's,[19] comprising those Malay nationalists who were unwilling to have compromises with non-Malays. Since its formation, it has advocated more extreme and chauvinistic policies in favor of the

[19]N.J. Funston, "The Origins of Partai Se Islam," Journal of South East Asian Studies, 7, No. 1, (March 1976): 58-73.

Malays than UMNO. Today the party continues to draw most of its support from rural Malays, with many influential rural ulama (religious teachers) in its ranks. It is the main competitor for Malay votes with UMNO.

The main opposition competitor of the National Front for Chinese votes comes from the Democratic Action Party (DAP). It is a left-wing party which advocates a multiracial socialist society. Although avowedly non-communal, the DAP draws its support primarily from urban working-class Chinese. Since 1973, the DAP has held the largest number of opposition seats in parliament.

By looking at the support base of each major party and their interests, the lines of competition for political support can be seen. Since the demography of the country and ethnic animosity have not changed since 1978, these partisan competitions continued up to the 1986 general elections.

UMNO competes with PAS as the legitimate representative of the Malays. Since the Malays are Muslims, UMNO will also need to heed Islamic demands to retain their support. The UMNO leaders have generally been moderate secular-minded men who are willing to strike compromises with non-Malays. Until the late 1970s, the electoral issues among the Malays had been increasing the Malay profile in national life, increasing the Malays' share in the economy and propagation of Islam, in that order.

Similarly, MCA competes with DAP for Chinese support. A recurrent theme in the electoral competition between the two parties has been whether it was more effective to secure Chinese interests from within the Front - hence vote for MCA - or outside the Front - hence vote for DAP. Therefore, the relative electoral fortunes of these parties is a gauge for Chinese confidence in the Front to heed Chinese interests. The MCA's effectiveness in voicing Chinese concerns has progressively eroded over the years. MCA has had little clout over UMNO policies in

view of its weak bargaining position *vis-a-vis* UMNO. This ineffectiveness has cost the MCA some popular support, which in turn weakens its leverage on UMNO.[20] To get out of this vicious cycle, the MCA needs major concessions from UMNO over salient issues, concessions which the MCA has been unable to win because of its inability to deliver Chinese votes. DAP has therefore gradually emerged as the rallying point for the Chinese community and the main opposition in parliament.

The internal divisions and dispersion of the Indian population hindered the political mobilization of the Indian community. Without the support of UMNO, the MIC is not expected to survive. Thus, the best avenue for representation of Indian interests in parliament remains with the MIC in the National Front. The weak position of MIC within the National Front, however, means that the Indian community will not have political clout under present conditions.[21] Thus, the Indians, through MIC, have tacitly associated themselves with the indigenous Malays since the 1970s.[22]

To date, the NF represents the only viable coalition to represent both Malay and non-Malay interests. The opposition PAS and DAP have tried unsuccessfully to forge an alternative coalition to NF. Without some Chinese support PAS is unable to defeat UMNO, and similarly DAP needs more Malay support in order to reduce the NF's control of the government. Such cooperation is difficult to achieve since each side represents the more extremist interests of its respective constituents.

Among the various bilateral competitions among the parties, the most important is the competition for Malay support. The Constitution

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[20]One MCA leader was quoted as saying: " Give us a few thousand Blue identity cards [citizenship status], more land and land titles for Chinese new villages plus the proper allocations to develop them, and we will bring in the Chinese voters." FEER (14 Aug 1986), 12.

[21]Means, 204-8.

[22]Suhaini Aznam, "The other minority," FEER, September 10 1987: 46.

provides for a weighting system in favor of the rural constituencies in the electoral process. Thus, a rural constituency may contain as little as half the voters of any urban constituency.[23] Such an arrangement gives the Malays a significant advantage over the other ethnic groups at the polls because of the skewed population distribution in the country. Seventy-five percent of the Malays live in the rural areas, compared with only 44 percent of the Chinese and 59 percent of the Indians.[24] The advantage in favor of rural Malay areas was estimated to be as high as four to one.[25] Support of the Malay populace is therefore essential for winning control in the federal parliament. This electoral advantage enjoyed by the Malays continues up to the present date.

SUMMARY OF MODEL

The model constructed to represent Malaysian domestic politics is portrayed schematically in figure 4, where the upper tier of the model is overlaid on the lower tier. Between 1978 and 1986, the demography and support bases for each party remained essentially unchanged. Thus, the basic alignment of support and opposition among the actors of the model are stable between 1978 and 1986. The variables are the salient issues dividing the communal groups and the extent of electoral support for the parties.

In the lower tier, communal differences divide the population into two nearly equal parts by ethnic considerations. Although the non-Malays comprise Chinese, Indians, Eurasians and others, these ethnic groups are fairly united by their common opposition to Malay dominance. This cleavage practically coincides with the division between Muslims and non-Muslims. Salient issues which divided the communal groups up to

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[23]Bunge, 206.

[24]1980 Census, 16,21.

[25]Diane K. Mauzy, "The 1982 General Elections in Malaysia," Asian Survey, 23, No. 4 (1983): 500.

1978 were the preferential status of the Malays, the government's NEP, and language and education. Among the non-Malays, the Chinese make up the group posing the strongest challenge to the Malays. Consequently, mutual animosity between these two groups has historically been the strongest.

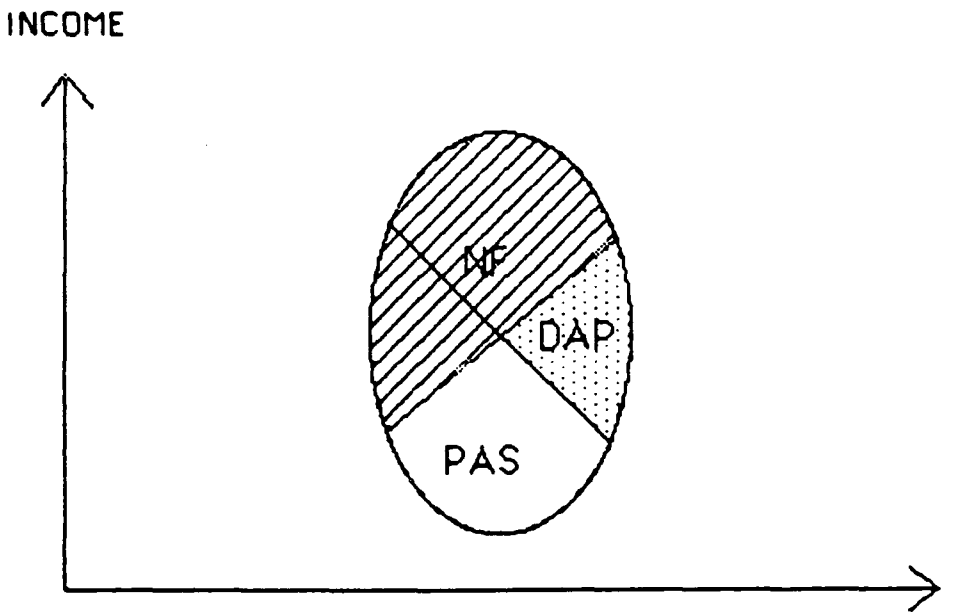

FIG. 4. MODEL OF MALAYSIAN POLITICS

Up until 1978, religion per se was not a contentious issue. From the Malay perspective, protecting Islamic interests is almost synonymous with protecting Malay interests. As long as Malays do not interfere with the non-Malays' freedom of religion, Islam is of no concern to the non-Malays. For the non-Malays, Islam is considered almost an exclusively Malay matter, and any attempt to advance Islam is considered an attempt to further Malay dominance in the areas of culture and religion.

Although less distinct then interethnic divisions, there are significant intraethnic differences within the communal groups. These generally coincide with the lines between the haves and have-nots.

At the upper tier of the model, the major political parties are all communally based. Thus, the ruling UMNO competes with PAS for Malay support. UMNO enjoys support from the Malay middle class and elite, while PAS has the strongest support among the poorer rural Malays. Similarly, MCA and DAP compete with each other to represent Chinese interests. MCA's support came mainly from the Chinese business class, whereas DAP enjoys support from urban working class Chinese. Thus, within the Malay and Chinese communities, the battle lines between the respective parties appear to coincide with intraethnic divisions.

No single party enjoys the necessary support to bridge communal divisions on its own. The NF had the widest appeal to voters of all races, thus enabling it to straddle communal differences since 1969. The stability of the Front was perhaps one of the key factors in preserving racial harmony within the country. Although the Front generally took a moderate position on communal issues, it had shown a definite lean toward the Malays, reflecting the dominance of UMNO within the coalition.

In the Malaysian electoral system, the Malay voters continue to play a pivotal role up to the present. The electoral system favors the predominantly Malay constituencies. Malay electoral support is therefore crucial for any political party to secure a majority in parliament. It is among these people, who were Muslims, where UMNO competed with the Islamic PAS for legitimacy as communal representative. To retain power, the UMNO-dominated government needs to be sympathetic toward Malay demands. Apart from any direct impact on communal relations, a revival in Islam can affect government policies toward the Muslims/Malays. This predisposition toward satisfying Malay demands is one important reason why the Islamic revival can have strong political consequences, as will be seen in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

CHARACTERISTICS OF ISLAMIC REVIVAL IN MALAYSIA

This chapter presents the findings for steps 2 and 3 of the analysis. It begins with an analysis of the characteristics of the Islamic revival movement in Malaysia from the mid-seventies until 1986. The revivalists, their activities and demands are examined to highlight those features which could have an effect on political relations between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Based on these characteristics, the second part of the chapter analyzes possible consequences of the revival using the model constructed in chapter 3. The manner in which the revival can affect the salient issues between Malays and non-Malays is discussed. Thereafter the model is used to postulate possible observable effects on the political relations among the communal groups.

ISLAMIC REVIVAL MOVEMENTS IN MALAYSIA

GENERAL

What is popularly referred to as the contemporary "Islamic revival" in Malaysia is by no means a monolithic, unified or even coordinated movement. Even though it has consequences in the political arena, it is

primarily a social phenomenon affecting the Muslim community. Although it has made its impact felt throughout Malay society, it is most discernible among urban Malay youth. Previously, it was more common for urban Malays to be nominal in their religious commitment compared to the rural Malays. In the wake of the revival, not only was there a greater awareness of Islam in everyday life and a desire for more knowledge on Islam, there was also a marked increase in attention to rituals and religious observance. Younger urban Muslims are increasingly adopting Middle Eastern attire in preference to traditional Malay or Western garb.

At the forefront of the contemporary revival in Malaysia are non-government Islamic missionary organizations, called ***dakwah*** groups. Since the mid-seventies, there has been a growing number of these groups devoted to raising the level of Islamic consciousness in the Muslim communities and, in some cases, to actively evangelize. Some of these groups are regarded by the authorities as deviant and a potential source of violence related to religion. According to some sources, there are at least 40 deviant groups in Malaysia with some 30,000 followers.[1] These groups are considered security risks, and are actively monitored. In many cases they are proscribed by the government in the name of regulating teachings considered unorthodox by the religious authorities. Most of these small deviant groups do not enjoy widespread support, and only have localized influence. The ***dakwah*** groups with the greatest political impact at the national level are restricted to a small number of ***dakwah*** groups with nationwide networks.

FEATURES OF NATIONAL *DAKWAH* ORGANIZATIONS

The major ***dakwah*** groups differ substantially from each other in their beliefs, organization and modus operandi. For example, the group ***Darul Arqam*** strives toward total independence from non-Muslims by

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[1]Simon Barraclough, "Managing the challenges of Islamic revival in Malaysia", Asian Survey, 23, No. 8, (August 1983): 960.

organizing reclusive communes for its members. At the other extreme, *Tabligh* operates through a loose and informal network of missionaries who travel around the country.

Although these large *dakwah* organizations differ substantially from each other in their beliefs and modus operandi, they share some common characteristics which have consequences for communal relations. These features are an almost exclusive focus on born Muslims, a fundamentalist orientation, support among the urban Muslims, and a desire for an Islamic state.

The major *dakwah* groups are committed to revitalizing the faith of the Muslim (mainly Malay) population. Their efforts are aimed at encouraging born Muslims to greater individual piety and commitment to the faith. A typical belief among the *dakwah* groups is the quote from a *dakwah* member: "If individuals were moral and upright, society would also be clean and wholesome.."[2] Little attempt was made by these non-government organizations to evangelize among the non-Muslims, despite the original intent of the spirit of *dakwah* to spread the faith. There is thus no prospect of these spontaneous movements to bridge ethnic differences through Islam.

Another prominent common feature is the fundamentalist nature of their beliefs. With varying degree, they favor an unquestioning acceptance of traditional practices and religious interpretation without further exegesis or reinterpretation. Not for them is the refining or adapting of Islamic ideals to suit modern conditions. This has not only led to a tightening of personal observance in rituals and dressing, but also changes to attitudes toward public and personal morals. Secularism and Western ideologies are criticized as being antithetical to the ideals of an Islamic state.[3] Many *dakwah* groups are

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[2]Chandra Muzaffar, Islamic Insurgence in Malaysia, 45.

[3]Nagata, The Reflowering of Malaysian Islam, 92. Also Chandra Muzaffar, Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia, 48.

critical of the perceived decadence in Western-style practices and entertainment within the country. The government perceives this as an undesirable trait, since it runs counter to much of the government's Western-style economic and development practices.

Scrupulous observance of rituals and seclusion from undesirable influences by *dakwah* followers reduce their social contact between the non-Muslims. Some *dakwah* groups deliberately try to minimize contact with non-Muslims. For example, *Darul Arqam's* most distinctive feature is its pursuit of a self sufficient economic organization based on Islamic principles. A second goal is for total independence from non-Muslim control. On the grounds that the Muslims are too dependent on non-Muslims for their daily needs, the Muslims are urged to be self-sufficient. There is a strong desire to shake off the yoke of Chinese and foreign domination in the Malaysian economy.[4] Hence, the fundamentalist character of these groups not only maintains, but also increases the social distance between the Muslims and non-Muslims.

The contemporary *dakwah* organizations find their strongest followings among the highly educated, professionals, and the urban middle class Malays rather than in the rural areas. However in the rural areas, the Muslims are traditionally more devout than the urban dwellers, elements of non-Islamic practices notwithstanding. The revival thus represents a revival among the younger members of the urban Muslim (mainly Malay) middle-class, who are generally nominal in their religious commitment compared to the rural Muslims.

All the movements espouse the establishment of an Islamic state. However, the problem of defining an Islamic state unresolved. Individual followers hold a wide spectrum of often conflicting opinions regarding the nature of an Islamic state. For example, some oppose penalties prescribed by traditional Islamic law, such as cutting off the hands of thieves, as being too harsh while others insist that they are

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[4]Judith Nagata, The Reflowering of Malaysian Islam, 107.

an essential part of an Islamic state.[5] In addition to these definitional difficulties, the details of how an Islamic state is to be implemented and the handling of the non-Muslim population have not been addressed.

Most of the major *dakwah* groups are not considered a political threat by the government, with the exception of *Angkata Belia Islam* (Islamic Youth Movement), ABIM for short. Unlike the other groups which shun publicity and prefer to spread their convictions quietly, ABIM leaders are vocal critics of the government. Many of the leaders have crossed over to politics. They have been critical of the Malay-dominated government on a number of reform issues which cut across ethnic lines. ABIM has consistently criticized the government for not tackling corruption and poverty earnestly enough. More frequently, it has upbraided the government for permitting gambling, lotteries, consumption of alcohol and other "decadent" activities contrary to Islamic ideals.

Concerning ethnic relations, the ABIM leadership has been a consistent opponent of racism. In particular it opposes the government's policies on *bumiputras* as being contrary to the Islamic call to unite different communities and to encourage tolerance, friendship and mutual respect among all human beings.[6] Such a sentiment is, however, countervailed by the attitudes of the rank and file members who are able reconcile or accept the contradictions. Such attitudes are found in other *dakwah* groups. Thus on many campuses where ABIM members are most heavily concentrated, the comments and opinions expressed by Malay students indicate a strong support for the direction of government policies concerning Malay rights, sometimes combined with unambiguous anti-Chinese sentiments.[7] Hence, despite the Islamic exhortations

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[5]Ibid., 120.

[6]Ibid., 95.

[7]Ibid., 96.

against racism, the revivalists generally are willing to accept a difference in status between Malays and non-Malays.

Even within the ranks of Muslims, this ethnic differentiation is maintained. This is demonstrated by the failure of the government sponsored Islamic Welfare and Missionary (*Pertubuhan Kebajikan Islam Malaysia*) or PERKIM to win non-Malay converts in the early days of the revival. Between 1972 and 1978 PERKIM claimed to have recruited some 8000 new converts, most of whom were Chinese.[8] Many of these converts were motivated by economic expedience, converting to Islam to qualify for preferential status by satisfying the official definition of a Malay as one who speaks Malay, practices Malay custom, and is a Muslim. Consequently, these new converts were often treated with suspicion by the Malay Muslims, and are often treated as inferior Muslims. By the late 1970s, the allocation of preferential status for these converts were tightened. This resulted in a decline in conversion and increasing numbers of apostates by 1980.[9] Hence conversion of non-Muslims to Islam has not been a viable way to bridge the Malay/non-Malay cleavage. The experience of these converts also demonstrated clearly that deep seated ethnic animosity overrides Islam's universal values which are supposed to transcend ethnic, local or national boundaries.

POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF AN ISLAMIC REVIVAL

Based on the character of the Islamic revival movement within the Muslim (Malay) populace, the model constructed in chapter 3 can be used to analyze the possible effects on political relations between Malays and non-Malays. The model predicts that at the communal level, the revival can deepen perceptions of ethnic differences between Malays and non-Malays, and increase conflicts over salient issues dividing the communal groups. At the political level, the revival is expected to lead to Islam being an increasingly important issue between UMNO and PAS

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[8]Judith Nagata, The Reflowering of Malaysian Islam, 171.

[9]Ibid., 194-7

in their competition for Malay support. Concurrently, the model expects a shift in Chinese support away from the government to the opposition DAP, reflecting the wider cleavage at the communal level.

GRASS ROOTS LEVEL

Awareness of ethnic differences at the grass roots level is the fundamental cause of antagonistic political relations between the Malays and non-Malays. Because of the almost exclusive identification of Muslims with Malays, the contemporary Islamic revival only serves to reinforce perceptions of ethnic differences. By focusing on revitalizing the faith of born Muslims, the fundamentalist revival movement cannot bridge the cleavage between the predominantly Muslim Malay population and the non-Malays. For the Malay revivalists a Chinese is no longer just a Chinese but also a non-believer, or an infidel. Such perceived differences can be further exacerbated by the fundamentalist character of the revival. The donning of distinctly 'Islamic' garb and strict observance of other rituals by Muslim fundamentalists further accentuate the differences with non-Muslims, and can increase the social distance between the Malays and non-Muslims. Thus, in spite of the anti-racist ideals in Islam, the Islamic revival is expected to widen the cleavage between Malays and non-Malays.

Establishing an Islamic state is a key goal of the revivalists. Depending on the nature of such an Islamic state, the pursuit of this goal will impinge on non-Malays' interests in the salient issues. In principle, an Islamic state will be run according to Islamic laws. Under such a system, the leaders will have to be Muslims. Hence, Muslims will be politically dominant in an Islamic state. The education curriculum will of course be Islamic, designed to impart knowledge of Islam and to cultivate Islamic values. *Sharia* laws will apply to various extent in all areas and will have jurisdiction over everyone, including non-Muslims. The use of Islamic laws will extend to the management of economics and commerce. These laws are generally antithetical to modern Western practices used in Malaysia. Hence changes in current commercial

practices may be expected under an Islamic regime. In the area of religious freedom, non-Muslims can expect further restrictions, especially in areas where conflicts with Islam occur.

Yet political dominance of the Malays, economics and commerce, education and religious freedom are precisely the salient issues dividing Malays and non-Malays. Pressures by revivalists for an Islamic state, or simply a greater Islamic character in Malaysia, will be construed by non-Malays as pressures to further Malay dominance in those politically salient areas. If the revivalists can influence the government to be responsive to their demands, political relations between Malays and non-Malays can be expected to deteriorate.

Before an Islamic state can be established, however, the revivalists need to resolve the definitional issues. As noted earlier, the revivalists have not defined what an Islamic state really means, what the status of non-Muslims should be, and how such a state can be established. Until these questions are resolved, the prospect of an Islamic state being established quickly is remote. However, in spite of this problem, the revivalists are unanimous in wanting a more Islamic character for Malaysia.

In summary, the model expects a widening of the cleavage between the Malays and non-Malays, at the communal level. More conflicts are likely to be generated between Malays and non-Malays over the salient issues. In addition to the traditional salient issues like preferential status for Malays, economics and education, the issues of religious freedom for non-Muslims and the status of non-Muslims under Islamic law can become increasingly important. If the revivalists can make the government accede to their demands, the model expects a deterioration in political relations between the Malays and non-Malays.

POLITICAL PARTIES

The revivalists' demands for an Islamic state will not be of great consequence to political relations between Malays and non-Malays if the government is not responsive to their demands. However, given the nature of Malaysian politics in 1978 and the nature of the revival, the model expects the government will indeed be responsive to the revivalists.

There are two reasons for this. First, Malay electoral support is essential for the UMNO-dominated National Front to retain power. As noted in chapter 3, Malay-dominated constituencies outnumber non-Malay constituencies by a factor of four to one. Hence, UMNO is obliged to satisfy Malay interests in order to defeat PAS, and to retain its dominant position within the National Front. Second, by virtue of UMNO's dominant position within the government, it is in a strong position to act on these interests, notwithstanding objections from other coalition partners. Since UMNO is both obliged to and is able to act on Malay demands, the government is expected to be conciliatory toward the demands of the revivalists.

Rural Malays are traditionally more devout Muslims. The contemporary Islamic revival, centered around the urban areas, represents a growing groundswell of interests in Islam among the urban Malays. As the revival continues, Islamic interests are expected to become more and more important to more Malays. Thus along with the revival, Islam is expected to be an increasingly important issue in the competition between UMNO and PAS for Malay electoral support. Not being in the government, PAS would not be able to compete effectively with UMNO on the traditional issues like preferential treatment for Malays. As part of the government, UMNO was able to deliver on campaign promises in these issues. Consequently, PAS can be expected to focus more on Islam against the generally secular-minded UMNO as the revival progresses.

In response, UMNO must at least be seen to be responsive to Islamic demands of the Malays in order to retain its legitimacy to represent Malay interests as the revival continues. Given its dominant position in the National Front government, UMNO is expected to promulgate policies sympathetic to the revivalists, but unfavorable to the non-Malays.

With the National Front leaning toward the revivalists, the model expects dissatisfaction with non-Malay parties in the National Front to grow. For the Indians, the electoral support for MIC is likely to remain despite this dissatisfaction since there is no other alternative to MIC which can better articulate Indian interests. For the Chinese, however, a swing of electoral support from MCA in the National Front to the opposition DAP can be expected.

In summary, the model expects the government will be responsive to the demands of the revivalists in salient issues dividing Malays and non-Malays. By doing so, non-Malay interests are affected, leading to a deterioration in political relations between the Malays and non-Malays.

SUMMARY

If the preceding analysis is correct, the model expects some observable effects on political relations between the Malays and non-Malays as the revival progresses. These effects on political relations between communal groups expected from the model are:

a. An increase in Islamic rhetoric by both PAS and UMNO

b. Promulgation of government policies to appease the Muslims.

d. Indications of increased ethnic tensions between the Malays and non-Malays.

c. A swing in Chinese electoral support from MCA to DAP.

These effects are schematically depicted in figure 5.

Based on the preceding analysis, the postulated process by which these effects come about is as follows:

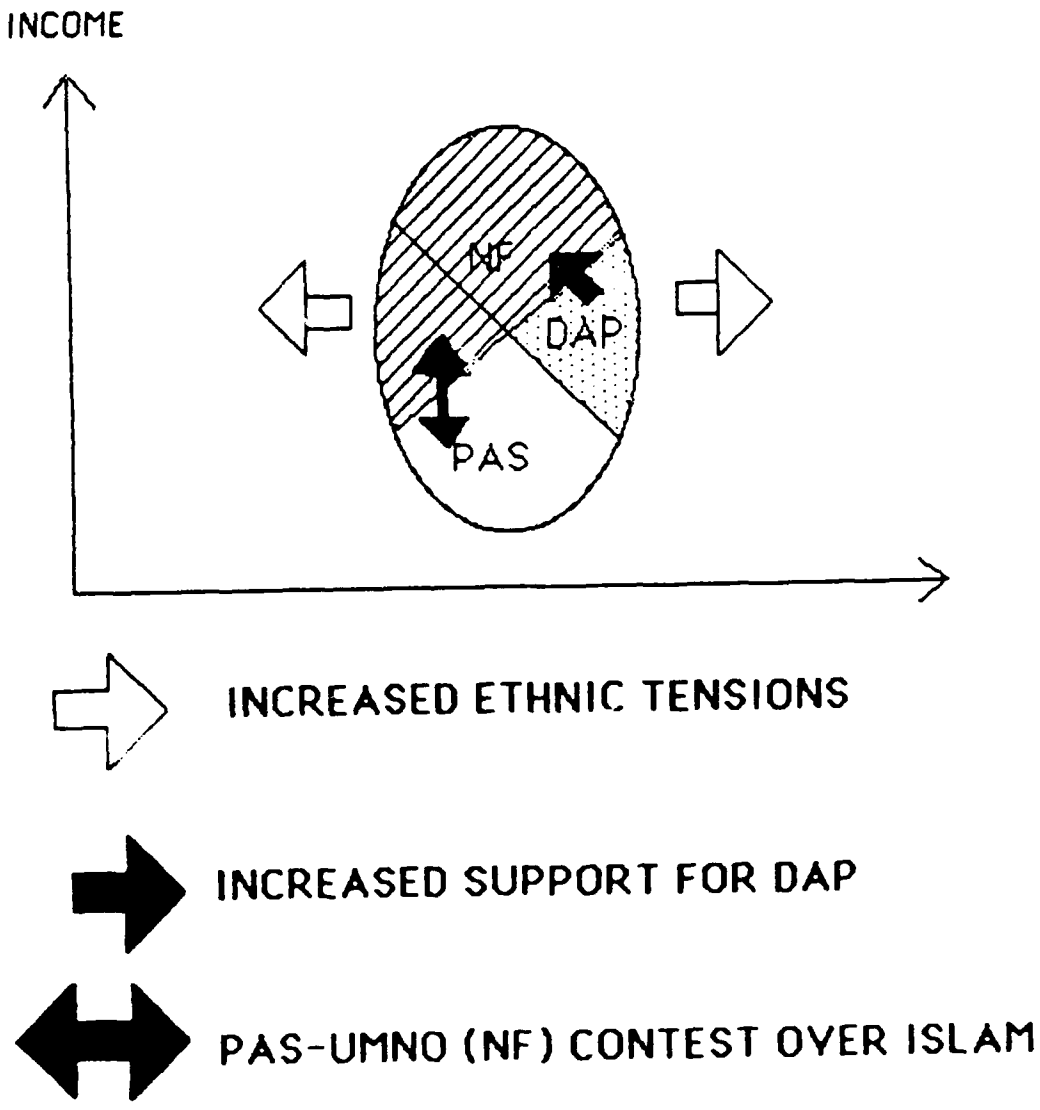

FIG. 5 POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF ISLAMIC REVIVAL

1. The revival will maintain, if not increase, the cleavage between Muslims and non-Muslims. This is because the revival is not associated with proselytizing among non-Malays, so that the revival is not expected to bridge the social gap. From the non-Malay perspective, the revival would be perceived as a movement to expand Malay dominance in the cultural and religious fields.

2. In Islam there is no separation of state and religion. Hence, the revivalists are expected to be very concerned with the establishment of an Islamic state, or at least in a greater Islamic character for the country. In response to this groundswell of Malay interests in Islam, Islamic issues are expected to be increasingly important in the competition between UMNO and PAS. Not being in a position to advance Malay interests in the traditional salient issues like UMNO, PAS is more likely to focus more on Islamic issues, using UMNO's secular character against UMNO. In response, UMNO is expected to implement policies conciliatory to Muslims but detrimental to the interests of non-Muslims. As more concessions are made, the demands by the revivalists are likely to increase.

3. As UMNO accedes to revivalists' demands to win Islamic credentials, non-Malay interests in salient issues may be adversely affected. In view of UMNO's propensity to favor Malay/Muslim support, MCA may not be able to extract concessions from UMNO in favor of the Chinese. MCA is not expected to strongly oppose UMNO's concessions to the Muslims by virtue of MCA's weak position and the need to support its coalition partner. In view of MCA's weakness to check what is perceived to be expanding Malay influence, Chinese support is expected to shift toward DAP.

4. If the revival gains momentum unchecked, the shift in Chinese support from the National Front is likely to continue. Under these circumstances, it will be more difficult for the partners in the Front to strike compromises acceptable to the communal groups. Without a strong electoral mandate, MCA does not have much leverage on UMNO. This

will threaten the ability of the Front in bridging the Malay/non-Malay cleavage. At the grass roots level, the rift between the Muslims and non-Muslims may be expected to increase, leading to indications of increased ethnic tensions.

CHAPTER 5

EFFECTS OF THE ISLAMIC REVIVAL IN MALAYSIA

This chapter presents the findings for steps 4 and 5 of the analysis. The model has postulated some effects on political relations between Malays and non-Malays resulting from the Islamic revival. Most of the expected effects are indeed confirmed to various extents by observations of the socio-political scene in Malaysia between 1978 and 1986. Evidence to substantiate the predictions of the model is discussed. Thereafter, a comparison is made between the political relations among the communal groups in 1978 and 1986.

PAS RESPONSE

The activities of PAS from the mid-seventies to 1986 conformed to what was postulated by the model. The Islamic revival has increased widespread Malay interest in Islam. Under such circumstances, the model predicted that Islam would become an increasingly important issue in Malay partisan politics. To wrest Malay support from UMNO, PAS was expected to exploit the growing interest in Islam in its contest with UMNO. A shift from traditional issues toward Islamic issues was indeed observed. Although the model could not predict whether such a move could bring success against UMNO, it did expect that it would diminish

the prospect of attracting more Chinese support and of establishing a rival PAS-DAP coalition against the ruling National Front. As in 1986, there were indicators to suggest that PAS's stance on Islam had hindered cooperation between the two parties.

UMNO-PAS RIVALRY

In successive elections in the 1970s, the PAS had campaigned on the issues of greater participation in the economy by Malays and the propagation of an Islamic state, with emphasis on the former. However, as early as 1978, PAS appeared to have raised the priority of religious interests above its traditional emphasis on Malay nationalism. This was indicated by its 1978 election manifesto, which emphasized "the role that Islam should play in the country, the sovereignty of the Malay rulers, the guarantee of ***bumiputra*** [Malay] political powers in the constitution and the need to replace the Western oriented judicial system with Islamic laws."[1]

The shift appeared more pronounced after the general election in April 1982 when PAS suffered major defeats. The majority of religiously moderate and essentially Malay-nationalist PAS leadership was purged at the party's general assembly in October 1982. The party now was controlled by Islamic fundamentalists, many of whom were ***ex-leaders of ABIM, the dakwah*** group which received the most public attention.[2] Since then PAS has unequivocally declared its endorsement of the principles and ideals of an Islamic state based on the total application of Islamic law.[3] To dispel its traditional image of merely representing extremist Malay interests, PAS had recruited several Chinese Muslim converts.

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[1] Harold Crouch, Lee Kuan Hing, and Michael Ong, Malaysian Politics and the 1978 Election (Kuala Lumpur, 1980), 89.

[2] Mauzy and Milne, "The Mahathir Administration in Malaysia: Discipline through Islam," Pacific Affairs 56, No.4 (Winter 1983): 643.

[3] ***Manifesto Pilihanraya Pas*** (Kedah: ***Urusetia Pilihanraya Pas Kedah***, 1986), 1-6.

These recruits, who were often given prominent positions in the party, were among the most vocal critics of the government's policy of preferential treatment for the Malays.

As expected by the model, PAS tried to undermine the legitimacy of UMNO to represent Muslim interests on religious grounds by using religious rhetoric. PAS argued that it was the duty of a Muslim to adhere to everything in the Koran and the Sunnah. If he failed to do so, he was not a Muslim, even though he may profess faith. For all intents and purposes, he should be regarded as a *kafir* (unbeliever or infidel). This Muslim-*kafir* distinction therefore distinguished the faithful from those who have deviated or lapsed in their religious commitment. From a Muslim perspective, the state is not separate from religion. According to PAS's argument, since UMNO had failed to establish an Islamic state and implement *sharia* laws, and had even adopted Western practices antithetical to Islam, its leadership and members clearly fell in the category of *kafir*.[4] Therefore, UMNO cannot be the legitimate representative of faithful Muslims. At the same time, PAS had sought to present itself as the legitimate representative of committed Muslims.

The intensity of the competition between the two parties over Islamic credentials was clearly demonstrated by the deterioration in personal relations among Muslims at the grass roots level in many rural regions. Party followers tend to see loyalties in terms of absolutes. At the height of such animosity in 1980-82, village relations deteriorated so badly that there were instances of Muslims refusing to eat together at social gatherings and attending the same prayers. PAS and UMNO *imams* (religious officials) would have separate prayers for their respective followers within the same mosque.[5]

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[4]Malaysian Ministry of Home Affairs, The Memali Incident, (Kuala Lumpur: Government Printers, 25 February 1986), 22.

[5]FEER (January 22 1987), 24.

As long as the revival persists, the groundswell of Malay interest in Islam will continue to grow. As long as PAS is unable to compete effectively with UMNO on other salient Malay interests, PAS is expected to continue to exploit Islam in its contest against UMNO.

CHINESE SUPPORT FOR PAS

A casualty of the PAS stance on Islam was the prospect of Chinese support and the possibility of a PAS-DAP coalition to rival the UMNO-dominated National Front. PAS recognized that without the electoral support of the Chinese, it was unable to win sufficient clout on its own to establish an Islamic state through the electoral process. By fielding Chinese Muslims who were critical of the government's policy of preferential status for Malays, PAS had sought to dispel its traditional image of a party pushing for extremist Malay interests. To further allay the fears of the non-Muslims, PAS established a number of Chinese Consultative Councils (CCCs) under the joint leadership of PAS officials and prominent members from the Chinese community. These CCCs were meant to mobilize Chinese electoral support for the general election in 1986. The Chinese were assured that in an Islamic state, their religious freedom will be maintained. They would be free to pursue their economic interests without undue interference from the government. There would also be no discrimination in employment, state subsidies or scholarships for education unlike the current arrangements. Chinese education and culture would be preserved as long as they do not threaten or tarnish Is. m.[4] In spite of such assurance, PAS failed to get DAP to enter into an electoral pact in the 1986 election, even though it succeeded in securing the agreement of all other small opposition parties, including non-Malay based parties. Without DAP's cooperation, PAS performed badly in the 1986 election, losing four of its five parliamentary seats.

In spite of some initial enthusiasm, the CCCs failed to completely allay Chinese suspicions of an Islamic state. The MCA and DAP pointed

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[4]Chandra Muzaffar, Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia, 89-92.

out that in an Islamic state non-Muslims will be inferior citizens, with their fate decided by Muslim theologians and legislators. According to them an Islamic state would merely replace the present Malay/non-Malay differentiation by a Muslim/non-Muslim distinction.[7] UMNO appeared to have made some political capital in the 1986 elections out of such conciliatory moves by PAS toward the Chinese. UMNO officials accused the PAS of sacrificing Islamic ideals by compromising with non-Muslims (i.e. infidels) for the sake of some electoral gains. As long as Chinese fears of an Islamic state are not allayed, Chinese support for PAS and a PAS-DAP coalition are not likely to materialize. This would be in spite of PAS's attempt to distance itself from its traditional image of an extremist Malay party.

In summary, we can see that in the wake of the revival, religious considerations have indeed assumed greater importance among the Malays/Muslims as postulated by the model. The establishment of an Islamic state holds a very strong emotive appeal to devout Muslims. Such a sentiment was exploited by PAS against UMNO. Consequently, religious rhetoric had become more prominent in the 1980s in the PAS-UMNO contest for Malay electoral support. The failure of PAS's bid to woo Chinese support was indicative of Chinese apprehension toward the increasingly Islamic stance of the party.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

ISLAMIZATION

On religious issues, the UMNO-dominated government had always tried to find compromises which placated the demands of the Malays, but in such a way as to avoid antagonizing the non-Malays. This was made more difficult in the wake of the revival. The fundamentalist character of

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[7]Press statement by Lim Kit Siang, Secretary General of the DAP on 6 July 1985.

the *dakwah* revival and the challenge by PAS over Islamic issues have made UMNO nervous. At stake for UMNO was the basis of its popular support, and possibly the secular framework within which the government functioned all along. Many, if not most, of those UMNO leaders who took public office were secular in their attitude toward public policies.

UMNO's response in the late 1970s to the dilemma posed by PAS and the revivalists can be summarized by a quote from an ex-prime minister, Hussein Onn:

> You may wonder why we spend so much money on Islam. You may think it is a waste of money. If we don't, we face two major problems. First, Party Islam (PAS) will get at us. The party [PAS] will, and does, claim we are not religious and the people will lose faith. Second we have to strengthen the faith of the people, which is another way to fight communism.*

Initially, UMNO's response was defensive, as indicated in the quote. UMNO responded to the criticisms by PAS and *dakwah* groups like ABIM in the late 1970s by making mostly symbolic concessions to Islam: by exhortations against "deviant" teachings, by government sponsored *dakwah* programs and by establishing a larger federal bureaucracy to direct and control religious activities. The government's antidote to the influence of the fundamentalist revival was with material prosperity on the one hand, and creating official *dakwah* organizations of its own on the other.*

Government response gradually changed after 1981 when the incumbent prime minister Dr. Mahathir took office. The leadership apparently decided that the best way to meet the Islamic challenge was with more Islam. The nature of the response since 1982 was no longer perceived as concessions, but rather a part of an active government-sponsored

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*Rodney Tasker, "The explosive mix of Mohammad and Modernity," FEER (February 9, 1979): 23.

*"Tracking down some of the religious extremists," FEER (August 31 1979): 59.

Islamization process to increase the Islamic character of the country.[10] In Prime Minister Mahathir's opening speech at the thirty-third UMNO General Assembly in 1982, he said:

> Today we face the biggest struggle-the struggle to change the attitude of the Malays in line with the requirements of Islam in this modern age...UMNO's task now is to enhance Islamic practices and ensure that the Malay community truly adheres to Islamic teachings... Naturally this cause is far bigger than the previous struggles of UMNO (to win independence, to redeem the dignity of the Malays, to rule justly and brought about development). Of course it is not easy to succeed. But UMNO must pursue it, whatever the obstacles, for this is our real cause.[11]

This underlined UMNO's commitment not just to appear Islamic but to actively expand the profile of Islam in the country, and to upgrade UMNO's credentials as an Islamic party. Invigorating the faith of Malays was now a key goal of UMNO. By the end of 1982, UMNO was claiming to be the oldest Islamic party in the country, and the world's third largest Islamic party.[12]

As a tactic to defeat PAS, the government's Islamization program has had mixed success. PAS was decisively defeated in the 1986 election, retaining only one seat in the federal parliament despite pre-election predictions of strong gains. Elections results for PAS and UMNO between 1978 and 1986 are shown in figures 6 and 7. Despite the defeat, PAS succeeded in retaining 15.8 percent of all votes cast (compared to 16.2 percent in 1982). The scale of the defeat is further tempered by the fact that PAS lost 19 of its contested seats by fewer than 1000 votes,

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[10]Diane Mauzy and R.S. Milne, "The Mahathir Administration in Malaysia: Discipline through Islam," Pacific Affairs, 56, No. 4 (Winter 1983): 638.

[11]New Straits Times, September 11 1982.

[12]Mauzy and Milne, "Discipline through Islam", 635-6.

and 11 seats by 500 votes.[13] PAS is thus not yet a spent force, and the UMNO-PAS contest to "out-Islam" each other is likely to continue.

Fig. 6. Election Results 1978-1986
Federal Seats won by UMNO and PAS

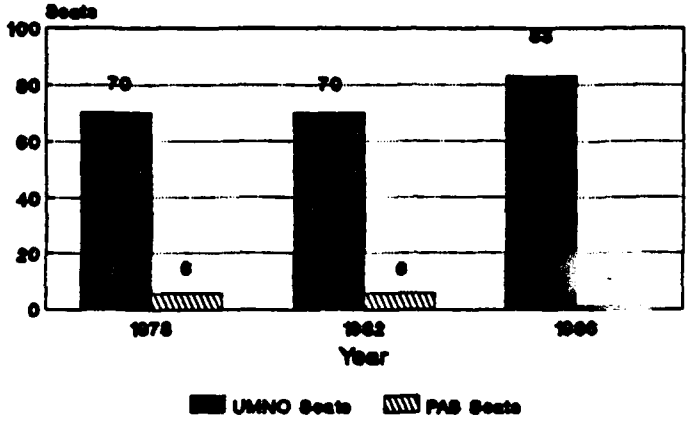
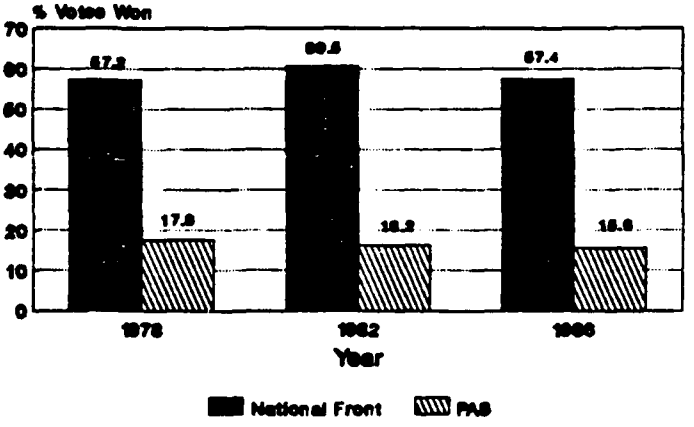


Fig. 7. Election results 1978-1986
Votes Won by National Front and PAS



[13] FEER (August 14 1986), 12.

Seen in the context of electoral considerations, UMNO's ongoing Islamization program is consistent with what was expected by the model. The program can be interpreted as an attempt to beat PAS and to further improve its support among the Malays by capitalizing on the heightened interest in Islam wrought by the revival.

EFFECTS ON SALIENT ISSUES

By being responsive to the demands of the revivalists, the model predicted that non-Malay interests in some salient issues would be adversely affected. In seeking a greater Islamic character for the country, the government initiatives in the Islamization program since 1982 had indeed intruded on non-Malay interests in some salient areas.

However, the government had generally been sensitive of non-Malay sentiments, and had backed off in several areas in the face of non-Malay opposition. Up to 1986, the Islamization program had not significantly compromised non-Malay interests in the area of commerce, education and implementation of Islamic law. In the area of religious freedom, however, the government had imposed some significant restrictions on the non-Malays. Such infringements have elevated the salience of religious issues between the Malays and non-Malays.

Commerce

Establishing Islamic economic institutions had been one of the most conspicuous aspects of the government's Islamization efforts. Among the most prominent government projects were the establishment of an Islamic Bank, an Islamic insurance company and various Islamic pawnshops. These projects had provoked initial fears among non-Malays, especially the Chinese. However, expectations of such institutions being the first steps to Islamize the commercial system in the country did not

materialize by 1986. By 1986, many of the initial fears had subsided.[14]

Education

Islamic education was intensified under the government's Islamization efforts. The government attempted to introduce compulsory Islamic civilization studies at the tertiary level for both Muslims and non-Muslims.[15] In the face of opposition, however, the government retracted its decision and made the course optional for non-Muslims. At the primary and secondary level, the curriculum of Islamic subjects in Malay schools was increased from 30 minutes to 150 minutes a week, and the use of Arabic script for instruction was also increased.[16] In lieu of Islamic classes, non-Muslim pupils in lower schools were required to take morals classes.

Non-Malay interests were more significantly affected in the area of tertiary education. The government established the International Islamic University which was funded by the government and by aid from some Middle Eastern countries, like Saudi Arabia. This had generated much anxiety and unhappiness among the non-Malays, especially the Chinese. The approval for this university was announced in 1982, the same year when the government formally rejected the Chinese proposal to establish a privately funded Chinese university. From the Chinese perspective, the government response was seen as clear discrimination on ethnic grounds.

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[14]For a more detailed discussion of these initiatives, see Mauzy and Milne, "Discipline through Islam", 638-641.

[15]New Straits Times May 29 and September 11, 1982; March 16 1983.

[16]R.S. Milne and Diane K. Mauzy, Malaysia: Tradition, Modernity and Islam (Colarado: Westview Press, 1986), 94.

Islamic law

Along with the revival, the implementation of Islamic laws for Muslims had progressively been expanded since the 1980s. Various states have progressively tightened up the enforcement of Islamic laws which are applicable only to Muslims. In December 1985, in the rural state of Trengganu, the state legislative assembly tightened Islamic laws relating to marriage, divorce, family support and custody of children.[17] The bill increased the powers of the *sharia* courts and introduced harsher penalties for Muslim offenders. Since then a number of other states have followed suit and tightened the enforcement of *sharia* laws for Muslims, including those states with a significant non-Muslim population. As the states become more zealous in administering *sharia* laws, Muslim intellectuals are increasingly pressing for the nation-wide applications of *sharia* to both Muslims and non-Muslims.[18]

The government attempted in 1982 to introduce Islamic morality laws into the secular code of laws which is applicable to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. These laws would cover all aspects of morality, from prostitution to close proximity between unmarried people of opposite sexes.[19] This generated much alarm among non-Muslims since it would represent the introduction of Islamic law to cover non-Muslims. This anxiety was exacerbated when a government minister was quoted as saying that such laws were "to expose elements of Islamic law to the people."[20] Once the idea of morality laws has been introduced, it was feared that the way would be paved for replacing all secular laws with Islamic laws.

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[17]Noraizan Abdul Rahman, "Trengganu tightens Syariah laws," Sunday Star (December 15 1985), 6.

[18]This subject was a major theme of a recent Islamic seminar, "Toward Making Islamic Law a Reality in Malaysia," at University of Malaya, June 6 1987. Reported in The Star, June 17 1987.

[19]Star December 11-14 1982; New Straits Times December 13 and 15 1982; K.Das, "Courtship Gets it in the Neck," FEER (January 13 1983): 8-9.

[20]New Straits Times, December 15 1986.

In the face of strong public opposition, the government withdrew the proposal.

The government did, however, succeed in December 1982 to pass some amendments to the Penal and Criminal Codes designed to give the government wide discretionary powers to control religious dissent. It is now an offense to abuse religious freedom by causing disharmony, disunity, hatred, or ill-will between persons or groups professing the same or different religions.[21] The law would give the government the right to interpret religious tenets and precepts. The original purpose behind these amendments appeared to be the government's concerns for the deteriorating relations in the PAS stronghold states of Trengganu and Kelantan between Muslims who support UMNO and those who support PAS.[22] Under the amendments, "where any person alleges that any other person...or group or description of persons professing any particular religion...has cease to profess that religion or should not be accepted as professing that religion..." he shall be presumed to have contravened the law.[23] These amendments give the government a legal means to control the activities of dissident Islamic groups, in particular PAS's campaign to declare UMNO members as infidels.

These laws are also a potential means for the government to mute opposition by more secular-minded Malays to extremist demands from Muslim fundamentalists. Few secular-minded Malays dared to speak out against the pace of Islamization for fear of being labelled anti-Islam or even deviant.[24] For example, even the much respected Tungku Abdul Rahman (the first prime minister of Malaysia, widely known as the "Father of Malaysia") was not exempt from such criticism. When he spoke out in 1987 against the Kelantan state's decision to impose harsher

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[21]Star, December 12 1982.

[22]K. Das, "An eye on the Imams," FEER (January 13 1983), 9.

[23]Ibid., 9.

[24]FEER (January 22 1987), 25.

punishments in the state's *sharia* courts, there were calls by students from the Islamic University for his prosecution on the grounds that he was stirring up religious disharmony.[25]

These amended laws are applicable also to non-Muslims since they have civil status. This had triggered fears among non-Muslims that the government would use these laws to control the practices of non-Muslims. So far the fears have been unfounded. Except for a case in 1986 when two New Zealand Christian missionaries were charged for insulting Islam, no non-Muslims have been charged.[26]

Restrictions on other religions

The government's conciliatory responses toward Muslims in the 1980s have had the effect of interfering with the practice of other religions. This has served to cultivate a sense of religious persecution among the non-Malays, especially among the Christians. If this trend continues it would introduce religion as an increasingly important salient issue between Malays and non-Malays.

Since the 1980s, non-Muslims have experienced the effects of various government actions aimed at directly reducing religious competition that threatened the expansion of Islam in the country. The most prominent example was the dispute over land allocation for religious purposes. From the 1970s onwards, non-Muslims have experienced difficulties acquiring land for religious buildings, especially in the urban areas. Christians have begun to worship in rented houses, while Buddhists, Taoists and Hindus maintain shrines of various sizes on street corners. However, in 1983, state government threatened to terminate what was perceived as the haphazard growth of shrines and temples, especially in the urban areas.[27] Expansion of non-Muslim

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[25]FEER (February 5 1987), 63.

[26]Star July 10-August 1 1986.

[27]Sunday Star, January 16 1983.

religious buildings is now largely limited within the grounds of long established churches and temples.[28]

Apart from restricting land for non-Muslim religions, the government banned the distribution of *Alkitab*, the Malay version of the Bible in 1981. The government was concerned that the wide circulation of the *Alkitab* may inadvertently influence the Muslim population. The fear was that the unsuspecting Muslim may mistake the content as Islamic, and be led astray from the Muslim faith. This version of the Bible is, however, the most popular for the younger generation of Malaysian Christians who are educated in Malay. Negotiations between Christian leaders and the government resulted in a lifting of the ban in March 1984, when ten outlets were authorized to import and distribute the book. Such an incident only intensified the feelings of discrimination and even persecution within the non-Muslim communities.

Feelings of discrimination among Christians were further exacerbated by the ban on the use of certain common phrases and words. Some terms in Malay are the same for both Christian and Islamic concepts. In order to protect the unsuspecting Muslim from being lured by Christian missionaries who use these terms, several states have passed laws forbidding non-Muslims from uttering these terms in public as a description of any aspect of non-Islamic religions. Among the terms are words like *Allah* (God), *nabi* (prophet) and *iman* (faith) which are part and parcel of the Christian vocabulary.[29]

CONTINUATION OF ISLAMIZATION

In spite of the progress in Islamization, the ultimate goal of the Mahathir administration remained unclear. The administration appeared to

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[28]For a more detailed discussion, see Raymond Lee, "Patterns of Religious Tension in Malaysia", Asian Survey, 28, No. 4 (April 1988):410-2.

[29]Suhaini Aznam, "Mum is the Word," FEER (May 5 1988): 35.

emphasize Muslim unity and to view Islam as a way of uniting, disciplining and motivating the Malays, not just as a tactic to beat PAS. Just how far the process should go remained vague until now. Some within the ranks of UMNO believed that the process had gone too far, and had infringed on the rights of non-Muslim communities.[30] On the other hand, Mahathir himself stated publicly that he is not opposed to some kind of Islamic rule or state, even though he did not define the details.[31] There was no clear consensus over the definition of what constitutes an Islamic state[32] and the desirability of such a state.[33] The question of how the non-Muslims will fit into an Islamic state is also left unanswered. Despite this ambiguity in goals, the Islamization process is still ongoing.

As Islamization gathered momentum in Malaysia, doubts were raised over the government's ability to control it. For example, the law to forbid non-Muslim usage of some religious terms was initiated by state religious councils, not by the federal government. Although the federal government has some influence over these councils, it does not have total control over the activities of the states in Islamic matters. Neither could the government check the Islamic rhetoric of PAS nor control the activities of the *dakwah* groups. As long as the revival at the grass roots level continues, the pressures for the continuation of the Islamization process are likely to continue.

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[30]As early as 1983, Malaysia's living former prime ministers have called for a halt to the process. See K. Das "The Father of Malaysia Calls for a Halt," FEER (March 3 1983): 26-7.

[31]Star, March 13 1982 and New Sunday Times, June 13 1982.

[32]The deputy prime minister was reported as saying that Malaysia was already an Islamic state by 1982. Star, March 5 1982.

[33]In 1983, the deputy prime minister, Musa Hitam was reported to have said that Malaysia would not become an "Islamic state". Utusan Melayu, February 13, 1983).

NON-MUSLIM RESPONSE

GRASS ROOTS RESPONSE

As the revival gathered momentum, the model expected a heightening of ethnic tensions, or a deterioration in interethnic relations at the grass roots level. By 1986, four years after the launch of the government's Islamization program, there was no evidence of drastic deterioration in ethnic relations. This was perhaps due in part to the fact that time period was too short for the buildup of tensions to be noticeable. Also, the government's sensitivity to non-Malay concerns over salient issues had helped to minimize non-Malay displeasure. However, there was evidence of increasing strains between the Malays and non-Malays over perceived government discrimination against the religions of the non-Muslims.

The revival and the government's Islamization efforts in particular have been perceived as threatening to the non-Muslim.[34] According to Chandra Muzaffar, non-Muslim views on Islam were conditioned to a large extent by ethnic and political considerations.[35] Expansion of Islamic influence was construed as a means of exerting Malay hegemony. The image of Islam therefore suffered in the process and it provoked negative, if not hostile, reactions from the Chinese and other non-Muslims at the individual level.

It was also difficult for the non-Malay population to distinguish the Islamic quest of the *dakwah* groups and PAS from UMNO's Islamization efforts.[36] Malaysian non-Muslims are not convinced by UMNO's argument that the establishment of the Islamic Bank and the increase of Islamic instructions in schools, for example, were political necessities to

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[34]K. Das, "Preaching Moderation," FEER (March 3 1982): 22.

[35]Chandra Muzaffar, Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia, 94.

[36]Raymond Lee, "The Ethnic Implications of Contemporary Movements and Organizations in Malaysia", 81.

countervail fundamentalist influence.[37] These undertakings were regarded as attempts to further Malay power. Such impressions were reinforced by those instances, such as the restriction on the *Alkitab*, when Muslim demands were met at the expense of non-Muslim interests. Sporadic acts of violence by Muslim extremists, such as the attack on a police station in 1980, have further strengthened the non-Muslims' antipathy toward an Islamic state.[38]

Non-Muslims were, however, understandably hesitant to speak out against the process since it is perceived to be a Malay matter. It would be presumptuous and even sacrilegious for the non-Muslim to criticize the process in any way. Furthermore, under the Sedition Act, Islam is one of the five subjects whose special status cannot be questioned publicly. Any attempt to do so can cause a backlash from the Malays/Muslims. Consequently, there was little partisan response to counter the challenges presented by the revival, except in those instances highlighted above, when the rights and interests of non-Muslims were directly impinged.

What the model did not expect were religious revivals among non-Muslims. Along with the revival of religious fervor among Muslims, there were indications of concurrent revivals in Christianity, Hinduism, and Sikhism in Malaysia.[39] Despite the coincidence, there was no evidence of the revival in these non-Muslim alternatives being provoked by the Islamic revival. However, some observers believe the growth of non-Muslim movements were accelerated in response to the perceived threat posed by the push for Islamic dominance.[40] However, the result of these

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[37]K. Das, "Preaching Moderation," FEER (March 3 1983): 21-2.

[38]Chandra Muzaffar, Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia, 94.

[39]For a more detailed discussion see Lee "Patterns of Religious Tension", 405-10; "The Ethnic Implications of Contemporary Movements",73-6. Also Nagata, The Reflowering of Malaysian Islam, 205-14.

[40]See for example Lee, "Pattern of Religious Tension", 405-6. Also Nagata, Reflowering of Malaysian Islam, 205, 212-4.

concurrent revivals further widens the cleavage between Malays and non-Malays. Now the revivalists on both sides are more conscious of religious differences in addition to the traditional perceptions of ethnic differences.

With heightened interests in religion among non-Malays, government policies which interfered with non-Islamic religions had incurred greater cost for the government in terms of alienating non-Muslims. The concern among non-Muslims was sufficient to provoke the creation of some kind of pressure group by the non-Muslims. In order to create an agency to represent non-Muslim's religious concerns to the government, the first inter-religious organization, the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism (MCCBCHS) was established in 1983.[41] However, the MCCBCHS has so far been ineffective in influencing government policies. Its main activities so far have been restricted to conducting seminars and releasing press statements, which posed no threat to the government. Of greater concern to the government, however, was the alienation of voters at the polls.

ELECTORAL RESPONSE

A consequence of the revival predicted by the model was a swing of non-Malay electoral support away from the government. Between 1978 and 1986, the Chinese political parties have generally continued to focus on the traditional salient issues of economics and preservation of Chinese culture. However, there was evidence of a swing in Chinese support away from the government, which coincided with the launching of the Islamization policy. The general elections results showed a significant increase in support for the DAP between 1982 and 1986, when the government's Islamization program gathered momentum. DAP's parliamentary seats increased from 9 in 1982 to 24 in 1986 (see figure 8). Voting patterns in both elections were split along communal lines. This

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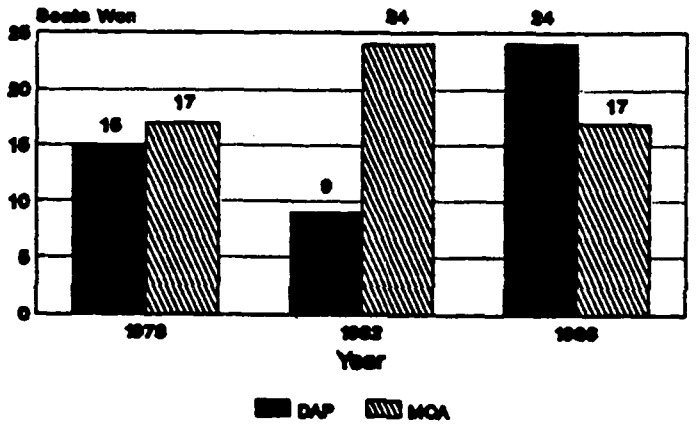
[41]Lee, "The Ethnic Implication of Contemporary Religious Movements", 82.

increase in support for the DAP is almost exclusively at the expense of MCA. In fact many of the MCA's 17 seats in the 1986 elections were won in constituencies with Malays and Indian voters who voted for the National Front. The National Front did not win any seats where the Chinese constituted more than a 59 percent of the population.[42] In both elections, MIC continued to command support from the Indian communities since there was no other more effective representative of Indian interests.

Fig. 8. Election Results 1978-1986
Federal Seats Won by DAP and MCA



In 1982, before the government's Islamization program was underway, MCA won significantly against DAP while riding on the crest of a few years of continuous growth of between 6 to 11 percent in the gross national product. That ensured that the MCA was able to secure from the government more scholarships and business licenses. In that election, MCA's platform against DAP was based on MCA's ability to win some concessions for the Chinese.[43] This accounted for MCA success against DAP in the 1982 elections, when MCA's seats increased from 17 to 24, while DAP's seats decreased from 16 to 9.

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[42]FEER (August 14 1986), 14.

[43]FEER (April 30 1982), 17.

Yet by 1986, DAP had more than reversed the defeat. Issues between MCA and DAP in that election were essentially the same. The DAP campaigned on the usual issue of the *bumiputra* policy versus Chinese economic interests, preferential allocation of land to Malays, and protection of Chinese education.[44] What was new, however, was the use of religious issues. The protection of Chinese culture against forced conversions was raised as an electoral issue. In some marginal constituencies, the DAP was reported to parade a girl who was alleged to have been forcibly converted to Islam.[45] The exploitation of such an issue, of course, cannot account for DAP's dramatic victory. The campaign platforms of the MCA and DAP suggested that until 1986, the Chinese were still concerned with the more traditional salient issues. However, they also indicated that by 1986 the concerns among the Chinese over the perceived encroachment of Islam were sufficiently strong to make the issue ripe for exploitation.

COMPARISON OF EXPECTED AND OBSERVED EFFECTS

The effects on political relations associated with the revival between 1978 and 1986 is schematically depicted in figure 9.

Analysis of the effects of the revival indeed shows that the observed effects of the revival conform to those expected from the model. This agreement validates the process postulated by the model to the contemporary Islamic revival to shifts in political relations among the communal groups.

Islam had emerged as the most prominent issue between PAS and UMNO as expected. As a tactic to "out-Islam" PAS, UMNO's Islamization program brought significant electoral success for UMNO. Although PAS performed badly at the polls, they still enjoyed considerable support

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[44]FEER (August 14 1986), 14.

[45]Ibid., 15.

among the Malays. Consequently the PAS-UMNO contest over Islamic credentials is likely to continue.

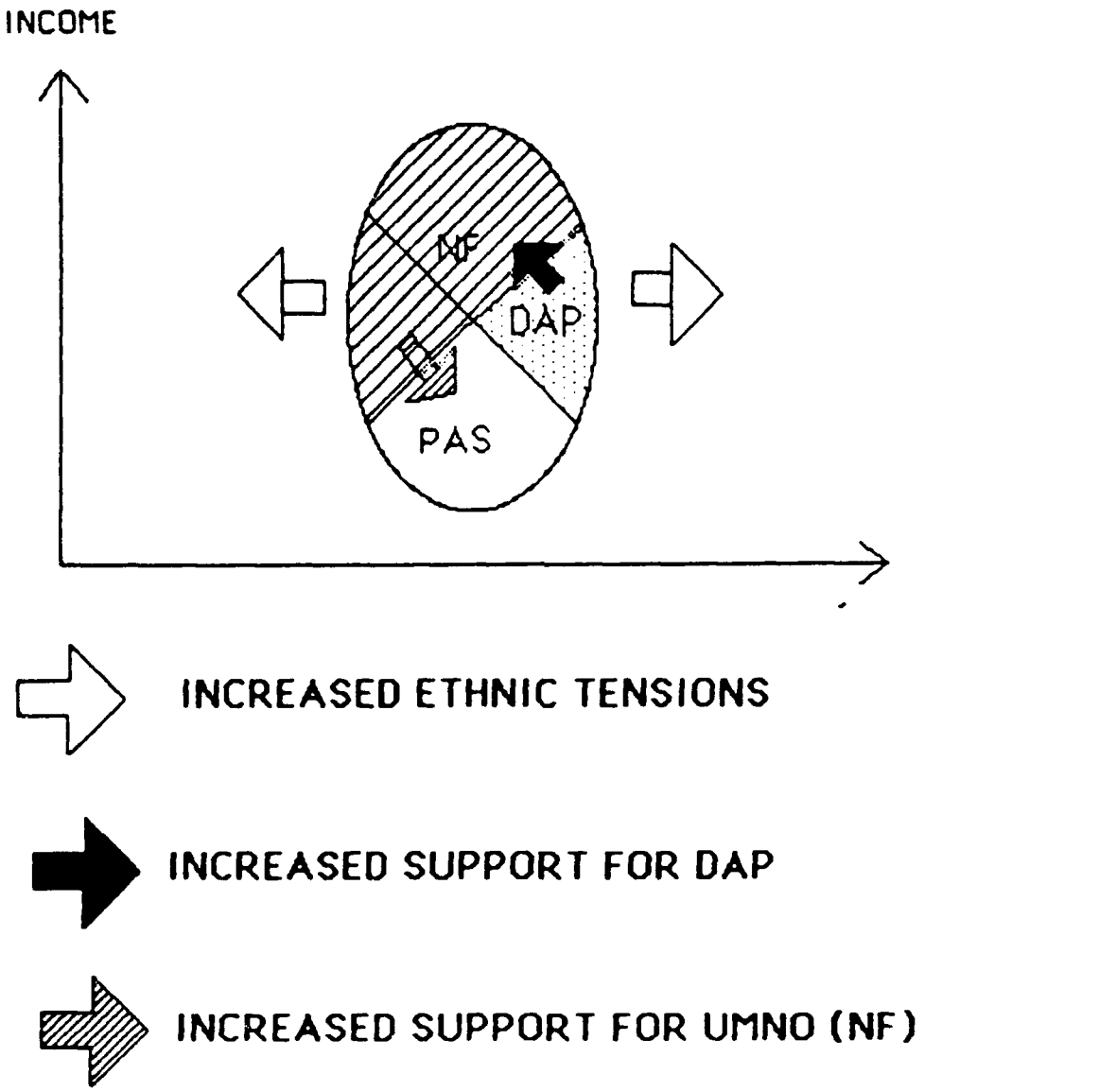

FIG. OBSERVED EFFECTS OF ISLAMIC REVIVAL (1987)

At the grass roots level there had indeed been increasing pressures from the revivalists for the establishment of an Islamic state. Through its Islamization program, the UMNO-dominated government had been

responsive to these demands. Although the government was sensitive to non-Malays concerns, government policies had infringed on non-Malay interests in salient issues. Non-Malays appeared to be increasingly wary of such developments, which were perceived as attempts to expand Malay cultural dominance. By 1986, however, the level of apprehension had not reached a level for non-Malays to actively counter the trend toward greater Islamization.

The trend toward greater Islamization coincided with a swing of electoral support toward DAP, reflecting disaffection with MCA in the ruling National Front. In the 1986 elections, DAP raised Islam as an issue for the first time. This demonstrated that Chinese concerns over Islam were sufficiently strong for exploitation.

An increase in ethnic tension, expected by the model, was not evident by 1986. However, by the end of 1987, there is clear evidence of increased ethnic tensions in the country, brought to public view by the government decision to appoint non-Chinese educated teachers as deputy heads of Chinese schools. The decision triggered mass protest meetings by the Chinese, which in turn triggered threats of counter rallies by Malays. The threat of violence was averted by mass preventive arrests of potential agitators, including half of DAP's representatives in parliament. In the universities, ethnic animosity between the Malays and non-Malays has also been steadily increasing, so much so that the government is now considering reorganizing the education system.[44]

Hence by 1987, there were clear indications of increased polarization of relations from 1978. Polarization occurred both at the level of party politics and, more importantly for the long term, at the communal level. The polarization at the communal level can lead to polarization at the party level and may eventually lead to an outbreak

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[44]Straits Times Weekly (Overseas Edition), (Singapore, March 11 1989), 8.

of communal violence if the revival and the government's Islamization continue.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The primary research question of this paper was: "How has the current Islamic revival affected political relations among the ethnic groups in Malaysia?" The research has shown an association between the observed polarization in interethnic political relations in the mid-eighties and the progression of the Islamic revival. Particularly in the area of national politics, there was a significant shift in Chinese support away from the ruling National Front. In addition, the research has identified a process by which the revival has wrought this shift in political relations.

The revival has propelled Islam from the domain of individual faith to the of stage of national politics in the 1980's. Despite universal values espoused in the religion, Islam is becoming increasingly important as the symbol of Malay identity. The contemporary Islamic revival in Malaysia, with its emphasis on revitalizing the faith of nominal Muslims, has helped to close the ranks of Malays against non-Malays. Parallel revivals of religious consciousness in non-Malay communities, whether or not these constituted an ethnic backlash, further strengthened the identification of religion with ethnicity. The revivals in the different religions accentuate the cleavages between

Muslims, who are mostly Malays, and non-Malays. If the momentum of the revival continues, this polarization is likely to become worse.

Several observers see the principal motive behind the revival as a need for the Malays to maintain a distinct ethnic identity apart from non-Malays so as to preserve their dominant political position.[1] However, at the individual level, there was evidence to suggest a genuine desire to pursue fundamentalist Islamic ideals rather than an overtly political motive to further Malay interests. This view is reinforced by the fact that some Muslim Malay intellectuals are against the government's ethnic policies because of Islam's exhortations against ethnic chauvinism. Whatever the real motivation, the revival represented a ground swell in interests among the Malays in Islamic matters.

In response to this ground swell, Islam has increasingly become the basis of legitimacy for Malay leadership. Thus the PAS has sought to wrest Malay support from UMNO by questioning the latter's Islamic credentials and track record for implementing Islamic policies. This challenge could not be ignored because of the vital importance of the Malay vote for winning the power to rule. Even if UMNO was largely secular in orientation, it could not ignore alienating the growing segment of the Malay population which had attached greater importance to a stricter observance of Islam.

To head off such criticism, UMNO has sought to strengthen its Islamic credentials by a process of Islamization in the country. There were indicators to suggest that this process of Islamization was not merely to answer criticisms of PAS and other revivalists. It also reflected the enthusiasm of the current UMNO leadership for a greater Islamic character in Malaysia, if not an Islamic state. While the Islamic character of the government has certainly increased, the

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[1]For example, see Chandra Muzaffar, 23-6; Nagata, The Reflowering of Malaysian Islam, 230-1; Mauzy and Milne, "Discipline through Islam", 632.

government still uses largely secular princples in running the government. Still, in the process, some policies of the UMNO-dominated government have impinged on the rights and interests of the non-Muslim population. Attempts to introduce Islamic education for non-Muslims, and elements of Islamic laws into the current secular civil laws have triggered alarm among non-Muslims.

The government's Islamization program has generated some alarm and frustrations among the non-Muslims. Islam is considered an exclusively Malay matter. It is a highly emotional and non-negotiable subject with the Malays, on par with their preferential status. Thus, there have been no active moves by non-Muslims to influence the course of the revival except for instances when non-Muslim interests were directly affected. The revival and the government's Islamization efforts are widely interpreted as continual attempts by Malays to maintain and expand their political dominance. So far the fear of a Muslim backlash has prevented active action by non-Muslims to influence the government's policies toward Islam.

In the area of partisan politics, the Chinese-based opposition party, DAP, has begun to exploit such fears. The specter of the Chinese being overwhelmed by Muslims has been raised in elections to wrest support away from MCA, the Chinese representative in the ruling coalition. These religious fears are one contributor to the dramatic swing in Chinese support from MCA to the DAP in the last elections in 1986. The salience of religion from the non-Muslim perpective will grow if the perceived encrouchment by the Muslims continues in the future.

In summary, the process by which the contemporary revival has affected political relations among the communal groups is an indirect one. The heightened interest in Islam among Malays at the grass roots level was exploited by Malay parties for political gains. This in turn further fueled the revival. The UMNO-dominated government's conciliatory responses to fundamentalist demands for a greater Islamic profile in Malaysia served only to alienate non-Muslims. From the

latter's viewpoint, the revival and the Malay-dominated government's conciliatory responses were attempts at furthering Malay hegemony. At the social level, the Islamic revival, together with concurrent revivals in other religions, has widened the social gap between the Muslims and non-Muslims. This polarization in social relations, if left unchecked, will have long term political consequences.

The key components in the process are: a ground swell of interest in Islam among Malays, desire by the political parties to win power, the importance of Malay voters and the non-Malays perception that Islam is a Malay matter. The analysis did not require the assumption that the Muslim revivalists are motivated by ethnic considerations. Thus even if the revival was not a veneer for ensuring Malay dominance, the research suggests that the dynamics within the Malaysian political milieu would have resulted in a deterioration of interethnic relations. This represents a significant departure from the popular view which attributed the polarization to the Malays' push for greater dominance, using the revival as a guise.

IMPLICATIONS

Whether Islam will further polarize the population depends on the course and the pace of the current revival. For the immediate future, a reverse in the Islamization trend appears unlikely. In Malay society, the dakwah movements are probably the strongest socio-cultural pressure today. What was considered extremist a decade ago is today respectable. The dakwah movement has nudged many nominal Malay Muslims into a more religious lifestyle, either out of peer pressure, or simply because being devout is no longer "old fashioned."[2] To what extent this trend will continue at the grass roots level is a matter of speculation right now.

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[2]FEER (January 22 1987), 23. Also personal interview by author with Malaysian army officer at Command and General Staff College, December 1989.

At the political level, the UMNO-PAS race to "out-Islam" the other can fuel pressures for greater Islamization in the country. Whether the process of Islamization can be controlled is of great significance for ethnic relations. The more rapid the pace and scope of Islamization, the greater will be the non-Muslims' sense of insecurity, and thus the greater the likelihood of further ethnic polarization. PAS has succeeded in pushing UMNO into a more Islamic mold, at least in terms of overt policy. It has also prompted UMNO into recruiting more Malays with strong Islamic background into influential positions. For example, in the current UMNO leadership, three of the six vice presidents come from strong religious backgrounds.[3] As the UMNO-dominated government adopted a more Islamic posture, PAS has moved, and probably will continue to move, toward a more fundamentalist position. Unless this spiral can be broken, the prospects in the near future for a moderation in fundamentalist demands for an Islamic state are dim.

In the longer term, a serious problem may have been created by the government's conciliatory response toward Islamic pressures. The more concessions are made, the more difficult it is to moderate further demands. Given the large numbers of Malay graduates with Islamic education, these pressures are not likely to slacken. As of today, the first groups of students from the Islamic University have already graduated. They will be a part of tomorrow's Malay leadership. Whether they will further boost the Islamic revival will have a strong impact on the future course of Islamization in the country.

At the moment, the National Front remains the only viable option to bridge the communal cleavage. Within the coalition, the only agent capable of moderating Islamic demands appears to be UMNO. In order to moderate such demands, the UMNO leadership will require the support of the non-Malay partners in the coalition. Without a strong mandate, it is difficult for the National Front to chart a balanced course through the competing demands. Yet such support can only be secured if the rights

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[3]FEER (May 7 1987), 14-5.

and interests of non-Muslims are protected. Such interests are increasingly hard to achieve in the face of their erosion by concessions to Muslims.

To countervail the destabilizing effects wrought by the revival, the government needs to moderate the Islamic revivalists' demands while also appeasing non-Muslims. Economic benefits appear to be the best incentive to win a mandate for the National Front. By government policies to improve the economic conditions of working-class Chinese, MCA can draw Chinese support away from the DAP. One of the biggest sources of frustration for the working class Chinese has been the restrictions on economic opportunities under the governments economic policies. Better economic status can compensate for his the fears of an Islamic state. Similarly, material prosperity for rural Malays offers the possibility of drawing rural support away from the PAS. A stronger mandate from the people for the government puts the government in a better position not to bow to extremist pressures. To improve the conditions of working-class Chinese and rural Malays will require a change in focus of the government's economic policy. The 20-year period for the government's NEP will end in 1990. Formulation of a new policy for the post-1990 period provides an opportunity for the government to defuse a large portion of inter-ethnic tensions in the country. Whether such a course will succeed depends on many factors, the most important one being continual economic growth and prosperity for Malaysia.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study focused on the activities of *dakwah* organizations which are centered in the urban areas and has not dealt with the reasons for the continual Islamic revival among individual Muslims. . Little attention was given to the rural areas, where local Islamic cults and other officially "deviant" groups appear to be more active. More research is needed on the nature and import of the Islamic revival in the rural areas.

Further research should also be conducted to determined the extent to which the revivalists' fervor can be "bought" by economic prosperity. The results may be useful for formulating a strategy to dampen the revival.

Finally, the study dealt only with West Malaysia. In East Malaysia, many of the ***bumiputras*** (indigenous people) are not ethnic Malays, and they are traditionally not Muslims. Since 1986, there is evidence of widespread Christian revival among non-Malay ***bumiputras*** in East Malaysia. If left unchecked, the grounds for the dominance of Islam in the country will be gradually eroded. There are also allegations of Christians evangelizing among the Malays which provoked considerable anger among the Malay Muslims against Christians.[4] This presents a new facet to the religious/ethnic picture in Malaysia which has not been adequately researched.

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[4]Personal interview by author with Malaysian army officer at Command and General Staff College, December 1989.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ABIM Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia, or the Malaysian Muslim Youth League, one of the most prominent of the recent "dakwah" religious movements.

Adat Traditional Malay custom, usually refering to non-Islamic forms.

Barisan Nasional National Front, the formal coalition of political parties which hold a collective majority in the Malaysian Parliament.

Bumiputra Literally, "sons of the earth," now applied to Malays and other races indigenous to the peninsula. Used as the basis of their entitlement to certain privileges.

Dakwah A generic term for a missionary activity which aims to revitalize the faith of lapsed Muslims or to win new converts. In Malaysia, it refers to urban based national Islamic revival movements.

DAP Democratic Action Party, a radical socialist party which is avowedly non-communal, but popularly associated with the Chinese.

Darul Arqam Literally, "House of Arqam," one of the three main dakwah organizations in Malaysia. It is distinguished by its emphasis on attaining economic self-sufficiency.

Halal Permissible by Islamic standards, normally used to describe food.

Imam A religious official in a mosque, who usually leads the Friday prayers.

Jema'at Tabligh One of the three main dakwah movement organizations which originated in India.

Kafir Infidel or unbeliever

MCA Malaysian Chinese Association, a partner in the Barisan Nasional, representing Chinese interests.

MIC Malaysian Indian Congress, a partner in the Barisan Nasional, representing Indian, Sikh and Pakistani interests.

NEP The New Economic Policy, a series of policies first promulgated in 1971 to eradicate poverty and to improve the economic status of the Malays. Due to expire by 1990.

PAS Partai Islam Se-Malaysia, the predominantly Malay Islamic opposition party. Previously known as Party Islam (PI) and the Pan Malaysian Islamic Party (PMIP).

Sunni Numerically the largest branch of Islam, to which most Malays and most Indian Muslims.

Sharia Islamic law, commonly associated with harsh punishments for 'minor' crimes.

Sharia court A Muslim religious court with jurisdiction over Muslims in Islamic matters such as marriage, tithes, inheritance etc.

Ulama (Singular, alim) Religious scholars or teachers.

UMNO United Malays National Organization, the dominant party in the Barisan nasional, representing Malay interests.

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